





WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE AND BEN JONSON AT CHESS

The Riddles of Hamlet *and* The Newest Answers

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A COMMENTARY ON SHAKESPEARE'S
MASTER-WORK



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To Old-Time Friends
A Little Token
Of Fond Remembrance

*“There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,
Than are dreamt of in our philosophy.”*



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No. 1

ERRATA

- P. 151, foot-note, read p. 30 for p. 36.
- P. 319, line 19, read reliance for alliance.
- P. 354, foot-note, read p. 35 for p. 51.
- P. 356, line 4, read counselors for councilors.
- P. 413, foot-note, read c VI. p. 35 for c VII. 51.
- P. 426, foot-note, read p. 233 for p. 297.
- P. 480, line 10, read fulfilling for fulfilling.



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Preface

The interest inherent in *The Tragedy of Hamlet* is perennial. As Shakespeare's most popular work, it continues to-day as in centuries past to captivate men's minds and to awaken their deepest sympathies. Other tragedies may equal it in beauty of imagery, in richness of plot, and in variety of characters, but there is one trait by which it excels all others, and that unique trait marks it distinctly as a tragedy of thought.

It is a mine of profound wisdom. "It is a work of such prophetic design," says Gervinus, "and of such anticipation of the growth of the human mind that it has been understood only, and appreciated after the lapse of three centuries." The hero under difficulties insurmountable moves with magnificent intellect in isolation and towering prominence against hateful and opposing forces, and exposes to our view the psychological action of the mind under strange and conflicting influences. He is himself the tragedy. He is a universal type of man's endless anxiety when, stripped of the delusive hopes of the present life and harassed by the personal sense of his helplessness, he is brought alone face to face with the silent and mysterious world of destiny.

Hamlet is in a manner the most typical work of Shakespeare. In it as in no other are blended his genius and his personality. Written near the close of Elizabeth's reign, it was often revised during the ensuing years while he was suffering acute oppression of mind and heart. Hence it is imbued with his melancholy, and reflects his world-weariness and sense of the foulness, emptiness, and fleetingness of life. "How," asks a critic, "could a man delineate a Hamlet, a

Coriolanus, a Macbeth, so many suffering heroic hearts, if his own heroic heart had never suffered?"

If then the tragedy reflect the poet's own experience and be the growth of his own mature judgment concerning the realities of life; if it picture the thoughts and actions of the hero under all the circumstances in which he moves and lives, as well as the religion and moral principles that dominate these same thoughts and actions; it should surely be treated in more than a conventional way, in a way, which instead of giving rise to doubts and difficulties, shall attempt to expose the mysteries that gem-like enrich the most glorious drama of Christian thought in modern times.

Hamlet is not professedly a religious drama. But if we consider that it is replete with religious thoughts and frequent allusions to an invisible power, supreme over human affairs; that its action begins with a preternatural visitor from the spirit world, and closes with the supernatural idea of angels bearing away a human soul to eternal rest; it is clear that Shakespeare has enriched this tragedy more than any other with religious elements of uncommon interest. Carlyle has not hesitated to say that "the poet and his era, as the outcome and flowerage of all which had preceded it are attributable to the Catholicism of the Middle Ages. The Christian Faith which was the theme of Dante's song, had produced this practical life which Shakespeare was to sing. For religion then as it now and always is, was the soul of practice; the primary vital fact in man's life."

If then Hamlet's religion was the soul of practice, the primary vital fact of his life, is it not surprising that its supreme influence should be commonly ignored? Any one who is an adherent of the Faith of the hero and acquainted with the history of English literature of the last three cen-

turies, must recognize the utter hopelessness of looking for a truthful and adequate presentation of the Prince's religious beliefs and practices. The more noted commentators, true enough, readily admit that he was a "very religious man"; but, unlike Carlyle, they seem to forget that the same Faith was his soul of practice and the primary fact of his life. Their commentaries, therefore, while most excellent in other respects, are unsatisfactory on the score of Hamlet's religion. Some ignore it altogether; others, failing to grasp its controlling influence, accord it but slight and incidental treatment; others whose religion is based on the principle of private judgment, measure his Faith with their own, and misjudge him from a lack of correct information concerning the true nature of his tenets; others whose sole knowledge of the Church has been imbibed from hostile sources, asperse and malign his religion, and misrepresent its sway upon him; others again who reject all belief in Christianity and align themselves with one or other of the schools of Freethought, confound his Faith with that of the many Christian sects, and while decrying all dogmatic truths of divine revelation, are ever ready to dogmatize against all things Christian. It would indeed be strange and a thing unheard-of, if under such conditions writers with minds thus indifferent, or obscured, or prejudiced, or hostile, were to give a just appreciation of a character whose thoughts and deeds are largely controlled by his Faith and its principles of morality.

This indifferentism and misapprehension concerning a most important element of the tragedy, the author purposes to expose, and, moreover, to exhibit how the hero's religion wields a paramount influence in the development of the drama. No one can hope to attain a correct understanding of *Hamlet* unless he view, as far as possible, its action and per-

sonages with the eyes of Shakespeare himself. He, as is well known, was familiar with the teachings and moral principles of the olden Church, and having once decided to make his hero a firm adherent of that Faith, he, a master artist, observed the law of consistency, and portrayed him in conformity therewith. But the Faith of His "most religious hero" is not mere emotion, nor sentiment, nor a something extrinsic, which, as a mantle, may be thrown on or off at pleasure. It is an intrinsic force. It is the primary vital fact of his life and the animating principle of his thoughts and actions; for, rooted in his intellect, enthroned in his will, and enshrined in his heart, it governs him in every crisis of conflicting interests and passions.

Hence, the exposition of this mastery will not only illumine, to a great extent, the many obscurities of the tragedy, but also save the reader, on the one hand, from a mere subjective concept of the hero, as an abstract or ideal personage, fashioned and colored according to the whim and fancy of each individual, and, on the other, hinder him from confining his attention solely to the externals of the man whom he considers the victim of chance, impulse, moods, and accidents. The comprehension of this grand central principle which animates and controls Hamlet's mind and heart, brings him more distinctly before us in a close and intimate relation; throws new light on his life, thoughts, acts, and sentiments; and, by disclosing the secret and invisible mainsprings of his movements, opens to our view a clearer vision of the mind of the hero and his creator, and so affords a solution of the several riddles which otherwise seem insoluble.

The author has *not* confined himself to a mere commentary. The nature of the work, he felt, required him to present pen-portraits of the various characters, not, indeed, in

accordance with popular fancy, but as mirrored in the text of the tragedy; to examine many opposing and misleading opinions of celebrated commentators, in order to expose in the light of the principles established, their discordance with the religious belief of Hamlet.

Part First is preliminary, and deals with many questions which, because of their important and intimate connection with *The Tragedy*, require a special and fuller treatment. Among them are the invalidity of Gertrude's marriage, Hamlet's right to the crown, his feigned madness, his commonly alleged vacillation and defective power of will, his character, as well as his religion and philosophy. All these present difficulties, the solution of which will throw light upon the new point of view taken by the author, and in consequence lead to a clearer understanding of *Part Second*, or the commentary proper.

The book with its many new solutions may perhaps merit the attention of all who are desirous of reading something new upon the most popular of Shakespeare's tragedies. If the perusal of its pages afford to these lovers of the Bard of Avon even a small degree of interest, or entertainment, or illumination, the author shall deem himself well rewarded.

The work is mainly based on materials gathered together by the author during many years for the purpose of lectures given both in college courses and in public. When any one writes on Shakespeare he naturally is indebted to a host of scholars who for more than a century have delved in the same literary field of criticism, and it is next to impossible for him to state each source from which he derived his information. Where, however, the author has consciously availed himself of previous works, he acknowledges his obligation, and this in particular to the *Variorum Shakespeare* of Dr. Furness.

CHAPTER I

Identification of Characters

Attempts have been made to identify the characters of *Hamlet* with actual men and women of Shakespeare's day. If one critic holds that the hero is throughout a satire on the famous essayist, Montaigne, another is equally certain that the whole tragedy is a veiled picture of the relations between the Queen of Scots, Darnley, Bothwell and James I. Other theorists identify Hamlet with Sir Philip Sidney; Polonius with Lord Burghley; Laertes and Ophelia with Robert and Anne Cecil; and Bernardo with Sir Walter Raleigh. According to another theory, the dramas of Shakespeare, whether comedies or tragedies, are largely Aristophanic in their intent, and are filled with topical sketches and allusions to which in many cases the clue is now lost. These theories, though entertaining to the curious reader, seem with the exception of that in regard to Sir Philip Sidney and Lord Burghley to have little objective reality, and to be the product of a playful imagination, rather than of sound critical judgment.

It is, however, highly probable that in moulding the character of the melancholy Dane, Shakespeare took a contemporary as a model in certain traits. Sir Philip Sidney had a remarkable personality, and was the most accomplished courtier of the Elizabethan era. He was curiously lacking in the characteristic blitheness of his times, and looked by preference on the gloomy side of things. Like Hamlet, he was a scholar and an idealist, and, living in an uncongenial environment, was ever striving in vain to escape from it into a life of action; and again, like Hamlet, in the lingering and futility of his later years, which were due in a great measure

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to the force of external circumstances, may be clearly traced the Dane's apparent irresolution and impotence of will.¹

Sidney was a special favorite of "Queen Bess," and, when wishing to sail with Sir Francis Drake on an expedition against the Spaniards in the West Indies, was expressly forbidden, because of Elizabeth's anxiety, "lest she should lose the jewel of her dominions." Though no brilliant achievement illustrated his short life, the singular beauty of his character won for him the universal love and esteem of his countrymen. "The nobility of his nature and the winning courtesies in which its gentle magnanimity expressed itself, took captive all hearts while he lived, and have since kept sweet his memory. Sublimely mild, a spirit without spot, he lives in the history of his country as a rare and finished type of English character, in which the antique honor of chivalry is seen shading into the graces of a modern gentleman. His sonnets are of rare merit; and his *Arcadia* is a work of indisputable genius, flushed with the light of a fine imagination, and its purity and tenderness of sentiment gives an authentic reflex of the lovely moral nature of the writer."² The universal esteem in which he was held was strikingly manifested at his death, when a general mourning was observed throughout the country. Another parallel is noted in the plaintive verses of the wits and poets of his day. They lament him, "The prince of noblesse and chivalry," in language, which naturally suggests Ophelia's moaning over her distracted lover:

"Oh, what a noble mind is here o'erthrown!
The courtier's, soldier's, scholar's, eye, tongue, sword,
Th' expectancy and rose of the fair state,
The glass of fashion and the mould of form.
Th' observed of all observers, quite, quite down!"

Others, again, see in Hamlet a reflex of Shakespeare himself. The Prince is generally conceded to be in advance of

¹ Cf. E. K. Chambers' "Hamlet", Introd.

² Fox Bourne's "Memoirs of Sir Sidney".

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his age. It may, then, well be questioned how came the Poet to create a character so foreign to the spirit of his times? In the light of history, we are wont to view the Elizabethan era as ardent and vigorous. It was animated by a spirit which, restless at home, looked abroad, and, enamored of maritime greatness, reached out to enterprises of discovery and colonization. Laertes rather than Hamlet was its exponent. The national life, wholly absorbed in material growth and development, was little troubled with vexed questions and intellectual subtleties. What, therefore, so stirred the Poet's soul as to prompt him to create a character so remarkable and born out of time?

We know that Shakespeare was not Hamlet, but, nevertheless, he seems to touch him on many sides. "The concentration of interest, the intensity of feeling, the hushed passion which characterize the play, make us feel that it has some exceptionally close relation to the Poet's own experience, and that, in an unusual degree, his personality pervades it."³ Is there perhaps something to connect the tragedy with the happenings of his own life and the development of his own spirit? Is there anything in the fact that it was produced in the tragic period of his dramatic labors and immediately precedes his two most sombre dramas? In their creation, we seem to see the creator's world-weariness reflected, and to catch his repeated sighs for a peaceful rest from the turmoil of a religious persecution which was harassing so many of his friends.

Commentators are in agreement that a dark shadow had fallen upon the Poet, overclouding his spirits, and filling his mind with gloom. He was stirred to his inmost soul, and, in the grand series of tragedies composed at this period, reveals the thoughts and feelings then most agitating his troubled mind. In them he struggles with the stern realities of life as he felt them under the political abuses and religious

³ Mabie: "Shakespeare, Poet, Dramatist, and Man".

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persecution of the day; in them he emphasizes the weaknesses of human-kind in its baseness, lawless lust, ungoverned jealousy, serpent-like ingratitude, disregard of human rights, and shameless treachery; and over all he holds, as a moralist, the terrors of conscience and the unfailing vengeance of the sword of fate.⁴ Some commentators ignore the cause of this gloom as something unfathomable, others assign only partial reasons, and others again explain it in a manner wholly unsatisfactory. This, no doubt, is due to one-sided views, which arise from the perusal of imperfect or distorted histories of those troublesome times. But modern authors, less biased and more critical, enable the open-minded reader to see light amid darkness. Former historians, following in the wake of their predecessors, were accustomed to repeat the story of the golden days of Elizabeth, and to portray with magic pencil the unprecedented happiness of her people. The sunlit cloud, however, bears a very dark side, as is shown by the dismal picture drawn by Catholic writers of the same period.

The nation was divided by religious dissensions into opposite parties of almost equal numbers, the oppressed and the oppressor. The operation of the penal statutes had ground many ancient and opulent families to the dust; and, enriched by their impoverishment, new families had sprung up in their place; and these, as they shared the plunder, naturally eulogized the new anti-Catholic system to which they owed their wealth and ascendancy. But their prosperity was not the prosperity of the nation; it was that of one half obtained by the legalized robbery of the other. It is evident that neither Elizabeth nor her ministers understood the benefits of civil and religious liberty.⁵ The great stain on the character of Elizabeth, affirms Macaulay,⁶ is the fact that, being herself an Adiaphorist without scruples about

⁴ Cf. Furnival apud Gervinue, Introduction.

⁵ Cf. "Lingard's History of England", vol. VI, C. 9, p. 664. (Edinburgh Edition.)

⁶ Essays, "Lord Burghley and his Times".

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conforming to the Catholic Church when conformity was expedient, she yet subjected that Church to a persecution even more odious than that of her sister Mary. "The persecutions of her reign," writes Hallam, "were often most infamously conducted. In fact, our courts of justice were little better than a cavern of murderers."

To see that Hamlet's gloom reflects the Poet's own, it is necessary to glance at that period of his life. When in 1586 Shakespeare fled to London to escape the persecution of the hated Puritan, Sir Lucy, it is more than likely that he was implicated in the religious turmoil of the times.⁷ He found the city a seething caldron of civil and religious strife. The Catholic gentry, notwithstanding the patriotism which prompted them to stand with the government against the friendly Catholic king of Spain, were still groaning under the pressure of incessant persecution.⁸ A spirit of unrest was prevalent, and mutterings of discontent were heard on every side. Elizabeth was accused of being under the thumb of her favorites, Leicester and Burghley. Though the Earl of Essex, after the death of Leicester, held the first place in the affections of the Queen, he was for many reasons in open opposition to Burghley, her prime-minister. With the hope of deposing him from power, he reckoned on the aid of the old nobility, who were suffering from oppression; upon a body of merchants, smarting under confiscations; and upon the severely persecuted Catholics, who looked on him as their bitterest enemy. With Essex, the leader of the party, was associated the Earl of Southampton. If the former, the greatest patron of learning in his day, was a warm friend of the Poet, still more so was the latter, to whom, as to an intimate friend and most lavish patron, Shakespeare dedi-

⁷ "Shakespeare's Family" by C. Stopes, C. VIII.

⁸ "During this period, 142 priests were put to death, because of the exercise of their religious ministry; 90 more died prisoners in the Tower, while of the nobility and other distinguished laity 62 suffered martyrdom. Hundreds of the Catholic gentry, and thousands of the lower classes were fined into poverty, imprisoned, whipped, or had their ears pierced with hot irons for conscience sake". (Guggenberger, "General History of the Christian Era". Vol. II, p. 296.)

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cated his chief poems. Essex, as an advocate of the liberal principle of religious toleration, had won over the Catholic party by openly proclaiming that "it was not an essential part of the reform worship, to persecute Catholics to death on account of their religion." His associate, Southampton, was cradled amid Catholic surroundings; and the traditional associations of his family, as well as his known friendship with Essex, naturally led the Catholic party to look upon the one and the other, as leaders in their attempt to regain freedom of religious worship.

With these noble patrons, Shakespeare aligned himself. To promote their cause, by voicing popular discontent and by propagating the idea of deposing the minister of Elizabeth, he wrote his drama, *The Uncrowning of Richard II.*⁹ In this play, the king is pictured as a mere puppet in the hands of worthless and ignoble favorites. The kingdom is bought and sold. England once glorious for conquests abroad, is now shamefully conquered at home by miscreant ministers, who in rapacity have leased out the realm like a "paltry farm." This drama, winning popularity, was repeatedly enacted, and even attracted the notice of the Queen and her ministers. In witnessing the play, Elizabeth recognized her proxy, and exclaimed to Lombarde and her attendants, "Know ye not that I am Richard the Second?"¹⁰ Burghley also felt that it reflected and caricatured his own policy of government. At his death in 1598, he was succeeded by Cecil, who continuing his father's course, was even more energetic in opposition to Essex.

It is remarkable that about this time, after *Richard II* had become somewhat trite, Shakespeare's new tragedy of similar import, was enacted upon the London stage. In *Julius Caesar*, noble patriots conspire the destruction of a man who at the expense of the people's rights and liberties, ambitioned absolute sovereignty. Nothing tended more than

⁹ Richard Simpson: "Politics of Shakespeare's Historical Plays".

¹⁰ Fleay: "The Chronicle History of the London Stage".

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this drama, to promote the cause of Essex and his party. The usurper, in the eyes of Shakespeare's friends, was Cecil, who by his ascendancy over the mind of Elizabeth, ruled as virtual sovereign, whose word was law, whose favorites enjoyed the great monopolies that oppressed the people, and in whose hands were their lives, their fortunes, and their liberties. By picturing the hated and ambitious Cecil in his supremacy, insolent, autocratic, and susceptible of the grossest flattery, the drama at once familiarized the popular mind with the odiousness of tyranny. This idea is inculcated in many passages, only a few of which are culled at random:

“Upon what meat doth this our Caesar feed
That he is grown so great?”

“Why, man, he doth bestride the narrow world
Like a colossus, and we petty men
Walk under his huge legs and peep about
To find ourselves dishonorable graves.”

“Age, thou art ashamed!
Rome, thou hast lost the breed of noble bloods!
When could they say till now, that talked of Rome,
That her wide walls encompassed but one man?”

“Ye gods, it doth amaze me!
A man of such a feeble temper should
So get the start of the majestic world
And bear the palm alone.”

Brutus, on the other hand, the hero of the tragedy and chief conspirator, the Poet so ennobles and glorifies as to win for him our sympathy and admiration. But in the eyes of the conspirators of 1601, Essex was the noble Brutus, who preferred death to loss of liberty. “The noblest Roman,” one of the grandest of Shakespeare's creations, is incapable of self-seeking, and, stirred by the loftiest patriotism, is the reflex of every virtue. To emphasize his own high appreciation of the chief conspirator, the prototype of Essex, his noble patron, the Poet closes the drama with Marc Anthony's

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transcendent praise of Brutus in words that reach the limits of laudation:

“This was the noblest Roman of them all.
His life was gentle; and the elements
So mixed in him that Nature might stand up,
And say to all the world, ‘This was a man’.”

To elude suspicion, the principals in the conspiracy were accustomed to assemble at Drury House, the residence of the Earl of Southampton.¹¹ Here Shakespeare and his friends were likewise wont to gather. During this period, arrangements were made with his company to present *Richard II*, for the purpose of enkindling the patriotism of the conspirators.¹²

The attempted insurrection was, however, crushed by the iron hand of Cecil. Several of Shakespeare's most intimate associates were involved in its fateful consequences. In addition, the circle of young nobles whose friendship he had fondly prized was shattered. The Earl of Pembroke, his younger patron, was banished from the court; the Earl of Essex was adjudged a traitor, and died upon the scaffold; and the Earl of Southampton, his long trusted friend and idol, was sent a prisoner to the Tower, where in daily danger of execution, he languished until the succession of James the First in 1603.

These misfortunes, so personal to Shakespeare, caused a thick gloom to settle upon his mind. Truly, “the times were out of joint.” The world had grown dark around him. His nature, so sensitive to the touch of evil and of good, and so susceptible of the strongest friendship, was acutely stirred by the sufferings and loss of his cherished friends; and, in consequence, his mind and feelings underwent a phase of bitter anguish and unrest. This fact is evidenced by the sudden change in the character of his dramas. His

¹¹ Cf. Lingard: “History of England”, Vol. VI, c. IX, p. 607.

¹² “Camden's Annals”; Lord Bacon's official papers concerning “The Treason of Robert Earl of Essex”.

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fresh joyousness, his keen delight in life and in friendship, and his frank trust in beauty and in goodness, which breathe throughout his earlier works, now yield to disappointment, to disillusion, to a new sense of evil, and the foulness that underlies so much of human life. The misfortune of his friends and patrons engulfs him in gloom; and his afflicted mind turns to the contemplation of the mournful world of tragedy. From his mighty dramas we may learn something of his own unrest and anguish of mind at the sight of his cherished friends falling around him one by one amid the turbulence of political and religious persecution.¹³

Shakespeare, moreover, had other troubles and anxieties of mind. He must have trembled at the time of the Essex conspiracy, not only for Southampton's life, but even for his own; for Philips, the manager of his company, was called before the Privy Council to account for the performance of the obnoxious tragedy of *Richard II*. It was declared treasonable, and was prohibited from further exhibition. His company lost favor with the Government, and were "inhibited" from playing more in London. In the interim, Shakespeare travelled with his company through the "Provinces," and, as stated in the title page of the *First Quarto*, played Hamlet at the universities of Oxford and Cambridge. This production was the first copy of the drama, which in the meanwhile, as is affirmed in the reprint of the play of 1604, he elaborated "and enlarged to almost as much again."

With mind overclouded with deep melancholy, he had turned to his *Tragedy of Hamlet*; therein at least he could freely and fittingly give expression to his grief of mind and heart. This is clear from the fact that his "enlargement" of the play does not materially affect the plot and the important incidents of the first copy, but rather the subjective elements of Hamlet's character. Hence, the Prince's overpowering grief and oppressive melancholy; his sense of

¹³ Cf. Greene: "History of the English People", Bk. VI, C. VII.

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tedium; his heartache and weariness of life; his distrust of fellowmen who seem the slaves of passion, self-interest and duplicity; his disgust for a world which appears "a sterile promontory" whose very atmosphere is rife with pestilential vapors; all these are feelings more insisted on, and repeatedly expressed in varied forms in the new soliloquies of the *Second Quarto*:

"The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,"

"The heartache and the thousand natural shocks
That flesh is heir to."

"The whips and scorns of time,
The oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely,
The insolence of office, and the spurns
That patient merit of the unworthy takes."

"I have of late lost all my mirth, and indeed it goes so heavily with my disposition, that this goodly frame, the earth, seems to me a sterile promontory; this o'erhanging firmament, this majestical roof fretted with golden fire, appears no other thing to me than a foul and pestilent congregation of vapors."

"How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable,
Seem to me all the uses of this world!
Fie on't! oh fie! 'tis an unweeded garden,
That grows to seed; things rank and gross in nature
Possess it merely."

"But break my heart, for I must hold my tongue."

The development of the contemplative side of Hamlet's character, was necessarily tempered by the Poet's own mental grief and gloom and, therefore, must have been a task not only easy, because a mere reflection, or a bodying forth of his own heated mind; but also pleasing because affording a relief in the utterance of the pent-up griefs and sorrows of his overburdened heart. As a consequence, the drama seems to reflect the gloomy thoughts and feelings which at this time afflicted the Poet's own life.

CHAPTER II

The Religion of Denmark in Hamlet's Day

From various references in the play, it is evident that Hamlet's existence is ascribed to a period of time when, in the early part of the eleventh century, England acknowledged the suzerainty of Denmark. The first Danish invasion of England in the year 994 was led by Swengen, king of Denmark. After ravaging Kent, Essex and Sussex with impunity, he was bought off by king Aethelred on the condition of paying an annual tribute tax, known as Danegelt. But, when Aethelred in 1002 had by secret letters to every city and town ordered the slaughter on St. Brice's day of all the Danes resident in England, his treachery aroused the Danes to vengeance. Swengen swore a solemn oath to conquer the kingdom. Landing again with a powerful force in 1003, the Danish king began devastating the land anew; and only after every means of defence had been exhausted, and the spirit of the nation was crushed, did Aethelred agree to an increased annual Danegelt tax of 40,000 pounds. But distrustful of Aethelred and mindful of his solemn oath, he determined upon the complete conquest of England, and in the year 1013 returned with a more powerful fleet for the third invasion. After his death in the following year, his son, Cnute the Great, continued the war of conquest, and in 1016 was crowned king of a vast Northern empire, which included England, Wales, Norway and Denmark.

Of no less interest is the question of the religion of Denmark in the days of Hamlet. When Harold, driven from his kingdom in the year 826, found refuge with the German emperor at Metz, he was with his queen converted

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to the Christian faith. Returning to Denmark, he invited Ansger and Audibert, monks of Corbie in Gaul, to accompany him for the purpose of preaching the gospel to the Danes. Harold's efforts to Christianize his people soon roused the enmity of his pagan subjects, and he was again expelled from the country. Little progress was made for years among this restless and warlike people, and often they subjected the infant Church to the severest persecution, first under king Horic, and then under Gorm the Old. When the latter, a fanatical worshipper of Odin, had succeeded in extending his power over Jutland, he raged with fire and sword against the Christians. But he met his master in Henry I. of Germany, who, having conquered him in a bloody battle in 934, forced him at least to tolerate Christianity in his realm.

His son, Harold, upon accession to the throne, became more favorable; for after his defeat by Otto the Great in 949, he was compelled to acknowledge the supremacy of Christian Germany. Persuaded that the Danes would never desist from their hostile incursions while they persevered in the religion of their ancestors, a religion which was calculated to nourish a ferocity of temper and animate to military exploits, Otto included in the treaty of peace the condition that Harold and his subjects accept the Christian religion.

In fact, writes the ancient chronicler, Saxo Grammaticus, Harold had been early drawn to the Catholic faith. His mother, Thyra, the daughter of the first Christian Harold, had received baptism in 965. During his reign of fifty years, Christianity, aided by the king's religious zeal, made much progress in the realm; but this progress eventually excited against him the enmity of his pagan subjects. They still formed the most powerful party in the state, and in 986 effected his abdication in favor of his son, the famous Swegen. To reward the good will of his pagan subjects, the new monarch manifested his zeal for the worship of Odin, by attempting to destroy Christianity. Apostatizing from

the Catholic faith, he involved the Christians during the early part of his reign in the deepest calamity and distress, and treated them with the greatest injustice and cruelty; but reverses having quelled his fanaticism he became, after his second invasion of England, more tolerant of the new religion.

His son, Cnute the Great, who ascended the throne in 1014, had been brought up under Christian influences in England. Actuated by a sense of duty, as well as by the insistence of his consort, the English princess Emma, he established Christianity on a permanent basis; and, as affirms Saxo Grammaticus, brought Denmark more closely to the centre of unity, by a formal visit of state, which he made to Rome in 1026. The conversion of the Danish people was as yet, however, only partial and lacking in thoroughness; for paganism, popularized in the worship of Odin with its deep-rooted superstitious practices and depraved morals, lingered long in the land; hence, even in the days of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, many traces of it survived, and continued to infect the minds and morals of the people.

The question of *Hamlet's* religion might merit little attention, if Shakespeare had lived in our day, when liberty of conscience, as well as freedom of religious worship, are principles more or less universally accepted. But, considering the fact that he lived in the Elizabethan era, when the rancorous zeal of the new religion subjected adherents of the ancient faith to cruel persecution; and considering, further, that the Poet wrote for popular audiences, which applauded all that favored the new State-religion, and showed hostility to all that was friendly to the olden Church; it must, indeed, appear remarkable that this *Tragedy of Hamlet*, which Shakespeare loved most, and over which he pondered longest, and revised most often, should above all his works be in tone the most Catholic. If to prove a successful playwright, he was obliged to cater to the popular tastes of his anti-Catho-

lie audiences, and thus sustain in public an appearance of orthodoxy, he did so in other dramas, in which his characters might rave to the full in their animosity against the Church and the clergy. Hence, we see in one the blustering, lecherous rake — Falstaff, whose friendship was fatal, whose hatred was praise, and whose sole religion in his dying moments was the mumbling of curses against the Pope. In others he portrays the newly created nobility, who fattened on the plunder of monasteries and estates of the Church, and whose highest self-interest was to glorify the new and to condemn the old religion. But the man whom Shakespeare chooses to vilify the Church is King John, who was, says Macaulay, the meanest and the vilest monarch that ever shared the English throne. In him he exposes the frenzied rage of a tyrant who exhausts the vocabulary of vilification against the Pope and the Church in a war which was not religious, but political, a war against the rights and liberties of his people.

There can be little difficulty concerning Hamlet's religion. Though Saxo Grammaticus, who wrote in the year 1204, assigned the legend of Amleth to a remote period, when the Northmen, still under the sway of paganism, had not yet received the light of Christianity, Shakespeare, nevertheless, ascribes the existence of the personages of the drama to the age of the first crusade, and portrays them with beliefs and sentiments common to the Catholic world of that day. Hamlet in person reflects the social life and manners prevalent in England at a much later period, and perhaps in the dramatist's own time. Yet his hero is strongly characterized as a Christian prince of Denmark, firm in his belief, and unswerving in adherence to its unchanging principles of morality. Hence, Gervinus, certainly an unbiased authority, could confidently affirm that "The Poet has in *Hamlet* expressly given prominence to the good Catholic Christianity of the acting personages."

If it is clear from the drama that Shakespeare has made

Hamlet a Catholic, it seems surprising that a few theorists have been found, who claim to see in him the incarnation of Protestantism. The Poet, they say, wished to hold up to the world the mirror of Hamlet's soul, wherein, all, who will, may see reflected the inconsistencies, and doubts, and contradictions, and obscure wanderings of a mind around which Protestantism has thrown its enchanting spell. Its fundamental dogma which makes *private* judgment — so variable in man — the sole and ultimate criterion of all divinely revealed truths, naturally engenders doubts and by a slow but logical process leads to indifferentism or scepticism.

Such a theory, while possible, seems at variance with evidence flashing from the drama itself. If the theory were true, it would prove Shakespeare the greatest seer of the modern world; for it would endow him with a great prophetic spirit, which peering down through future ages, foresaw the logical consequences of the religious innovations of his times, just as we see them about us to-day in their multiplied contradictory forms and *isms*. Beautiful and captivating as this theory may be, it cannot, we think, be verified. No serious reader of Shakespeare will admit without proof that the Poet really intended this Titanic tragedy to be nothing more than a mere burlesque or comedy on the doubts and errancies of Protestantism, which, cast rudderless upon the ebbing and flowing seas of religious beliefs, was destined through after-centuries to be driven hither and thither at the mercy of the ever-shifting winds of time.

The theory, very far from probable, rests upon an unsteady support, upon an assumption which is based on the views of the subjective school under the leadership of Goethe and Coleridge. They see in Hamlet a vacillating creature, who in weakness of will is ever designing, but never performing. But, as a superstructure is no stronger than its foundation, the assumption falls, because its support has been undermined, as we shall see, by the more modern objective school, which

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proves that both Goethe and Coleridge were utterly mistaken in their views of Hamlet's character. The theory is further controverted by evidence intrinsic to Shakespeare's dramas. They reveal his utter dislike of Puritanism, ridicule the Parsons of the new state religion, disclose his partiality for the creed of his fathers, and, according to an authority strongly Protestant, "always mentions the old Faith with a certain yearning of fondness."¹ Hence, Cardinal Newman felt warranted to write: "The most illustrious among English writers has so little of Protestantism about him that Catholics have been able, without extravagance, to claim him as their own."² This in mind, one can scarcely believe that the Poet intended to create in the grand character of Hamlet so noble a herald of the religious innovators of his day. From his hero's lips we hear fall not a word in approval of the "Reformers," no; not even an "adulterated drop of their new doctrines." All to the contrary, his every thought and word concerning religion are in strict conformity with the ancient Faith of his fathers.

¹ "Shakespeare's England", Thornbury, Vol. I, p. 211.

² "English Cath. Literature in Its Relation to Classical Literature".

CHAPTER III

Is Hamlet a Positivist

If any theory of Hamlet's Protestantism is untenable, what must be said of the view of certain Positivists who seek to claim through him a relationship with Shakespeare? Their claim appears the more surprising, if we glance at their philosophic system. Notwithstanding its apparent originality, which is due to modern dress and forms of thought, Positivism is the revival of the ancient doctrine that man is the measure of the universe. That all human knowledge is limited to bodily sense perceptions; that material and formal causes are unknowable; that final causes are illusions, and efficient causes simply invariable antecedents; that our intelligible world and the boundless universe, as well as the mind, heart and duty of man, are narrowed down to the mere knowledge of visible things; all these are fundamental dogmas of ancient as well as of modern Positivism.

As a religious system, Positivism admits neither the existence of the Creator, nor supernatural and spiritual agencies, nor the spirituality of the soul and its immortality in a future life of rewards and punishments; but, supplanting the personal God of the Christians by the "Great Being" called Humanity, it makes it the sole object of its veneration and cult. Mindful of these dogmas of Positivism, an intelligent reader will at once recall their multiplied contradictions in Shakespeare's works. His belief in Sacred Scripture, in God and Creator, and His all ruling Providence; his affirmation of the spirituality and immortality of the soul, and the existence of angels and evil spirits; his portrayal of preternatural agencies especially in *Macbeth* and *Hamlet*; his acceptance of purgatory, hell and heaven; his teaching concerning the efficacy of prayer, and grace, and the sacraments,

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as well as his ideas of Christian morality, as revealed in his good and evil characters; all are so emphatically affirmed in his dramas that his opposition to Positivism shines forth from them as brilliantly as the glaring light of day.

Apart, then, from the fact that the dramatist affords in his writings innumerable proofs that he was not a Positivist, but a believing Christian, upon what grounds do Positivists claim that Hamlet, as well as Shakespeare, is one of their own? A proof, thinks a certain professor,¹ is found in the famous soliloquy, in which Hamlet speaks of "The undiscovered country from whose bourn no traveler returns." Armed with this apparent proof, he attempts to inflict on Hamlet and on Shakespeare his own dogma of Positivism. The professor writes: "The metaphysical Hamlet sees a true ghost, but so far reverts to the Positivism which underlies Shakespeare's thinking, as to speak soon after of "the undiscovered country from whose bourn no traveler returns."

The Professor's assumption is clearly based on a misconception of the term, "undiscovered country," for an analysis of the soliloquy will show that Hamlet in reality admits, contrary to Positivistic doctrine, the existence of a spirit world, and merely regrets that it must remain forever "undiscovered," that is, unseen and unexplored by man in mortal life. *To discover* means, according to standard authorities, "to expose to view," "to bring to light,"—"to make known;" and specifically considered, it signifies: "to find and to bring to the knowledge of the world." Leif Eric and his roving Northmen landed on the coast of Massachusetts more than four hundred years before Columbus, and, nevertheless, affirms Fiske, in his "History of the Discovery of America," it is an abuse of language to say that they discovered America. Though De Soto gazed on the Mississippi years before Marquette explored it, the latter is justly called the discoverer, because, while De Soto kept his knowledge to

¹ G. Santayana, Ph. D.—Formerly instructor in philosophy at Harvard University. Cf. "American Eccl. Review", Vol. 17, pp. 348 and 484.

himself, Marquette gave to the world his maps and descriptions of the discovery and exploration. In Shakespeare's age, the use of the terms "discovered" and "undiscovered" country were common enough in their specific sense; many maritime rovers, following in the wake of Columbus, roamed the high seas in search of new lands, and, in giving to the world a description of their explorations, merited the name of discoverers, and were universally so acknowledged. Hence, though as a Christian, believing in the existence of the future life on the authority of Divine Revelation, Hamlet could, even after his conversation with the ghostly visitant, justly call the spirit world an "undiscovered country." His father's ghost gave him indeed an assurance of a life hereafter, but was forbid, beyond the specific purpose of his visit, to gratify his curiosity concerning the affairs of the other world; and, therefore, that world still remained to Hamlet "an undiscovered country." The disembodied spirit though permitted to revisit earth in the cause of justice, was not allowed to resume human life and, like a traveller returning to his native land, to disclose to fellowmen his discoveries and explorations of the unseen spirit world.

*"Ghost. . . . but that I am forbid
To tell the secrets of my prison house,
I could a tale unfold whose lightest word
Would harrow up thy soul, freeze thy young blood,
Make thy two eyes, like stars, start from their spheres,
Thy knotted and combined locks to part
And each particular hair to stand on end,
Like quills upon the fretful porcupine:
But this eternal blazon must not be
To ears of flesh and blood."*

That the ghost was forbidden to blazon forth to mortal ear the secrets of the spirit world, was sufficient reason for Hamlet to regret that that region must forever remain to man in human life an "undiscovered country." The prohibition so strongly emphasized by the ghost is in strict accordance

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with the the ordinations of Divine Providence regarding all still sojourning on earth. Truths of the supernatural order which are beyond man's native reach, have been made known to him by Divine revelation, not indeed to satisfy his curiosity, but for his spiritual or religious guidance here, and his eternal welfare hereafter. Christianity itself is a religious edifice built upon Divine Revelation, and, therefore, the faith of a Christian is necessarily a faith in God's existence and his revelation, which includes the fact of a spirit world invisible to human eye. Without this faith, says the Apostle, "it is impossible to please God."

The truth that a Christian's life on earth must be a life of faith, and not of vision or experimental knowledge of the future world, is exemplified in Sacred Scripture. When Dives from the torments in hell prayed Father Abraham for relief, he was told: "Between us and you, there is fixed a great chaos; so that they who would pass from hence to you, cannot, nor from thence come hither."² This chaos, which separates the visible from the invisible, or spirit world, seems, by the ordinary law of God, to be a gulf which bars all passing and repassing from one region to the other. Hence, the invisible world must forever remain to human life a region unseen and unexplored, an "undiscovered country," whose existence and whose nature can be known to man on earth only by Divine Revelation. This universal law commonly inviolable, flows as a consequence from the divine decree, according to which man's salvation depends upon his faith in God's Revelation; and it stood a barrier against Dives' earnest prayer. Experience has more than once attested the truth of our Savior's words that the man who will not believe the word of God on the testimony of his accredited prophets, will neither believe it on the word of one risen from the dead.

² Luke, XVI 19.

CHAPTER IV

Is Hamlet a Pantheist

Since Shakespeare's excellence has led various schools, whether Agnostic, Positivistic or Pantheistic, to claim him as a disciple, several writers have affected to think that he had no religion whatsoever, or at best was but a Pantheist. Others again affirm that every one, according to his view of the intellectual and moral world, may see in him an exponent of his own religion; because in the mirror which he holds up to nature, each one sees his own face reflected. While this reflection is universally admitted, not so, however, is the nature and material of which that mirror is constructed. The mirror is undoubtedly pantheistic, affirms Benno Tschischwitz, as well as Professor Klein, both German commentators. That they should wish to grace their Pantheistic school with a fellow-disciple, like the great dramatic poet, is, if not commendable, at least not surprising; but that they should base their claim on what appears to every Christian mind an unsubstantial shadow, is indeed a matter of much wonderment.

The claim of these writers rests on two assumptions: the one, that during Bruno's brief stay in London, Shakespeare attended his lectures; and the other, that he borrowed certain philosophic principles from him, and embodied them in the play of *Hamlet*, and notably in the soliloquy, "To be or not to be." Against this latter assertion, Gervinus affirms it to be his strong belief that a poet of Shakespeare's genius drew from the wealth of his own intellect the richest materials for the delineation of his characters. But, is it really true that the Poet attended Bruno's lectures in London? Is it, moreover, true that some of the views with which he has enriched his *Hamlet*, are, as not a few commentators think, in

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harmony with the erratic doctrines of the wandering philosopher?

A brief sketch of Bruno, and his mental aberrations will show that a kind Providence preserved Shakespeare from inoculation with so fatal a virus. Giordano Bruno was an excommunicated Italian monk. His life is the story of a restlessness of spirit, which caused him to wander the world over without finding an abiding home anywhere. When threatened at home with a judicial investigation concerning his pernicious morals and irreligious doctrines, he fled to Switzerland in 1579, where, after consorting for a time with the Calvinists, he was excommunicated by their supreme council. From Switzerland he passed to France, and thence to England in 1583. But as "neither his dear friends nor any one else, except himself, has left any mention concerning his brief stay in London," we should be slow to credit the unverified statements of a man characterized, not only by an astounding egotism, but also by a well known lack of honor and of moral responsibility. Even Lewes, a very partial biographer, found it necessary to note that there is a considerable *Forfanterie* about the Neopolitan, and that his statements must be received with caution.¹

Armed with a letter of commendation to the French ambassador in London, Bruno was much befriended by him, and was not slow to pay court to the "Virgin Queen," who, as he declared, "from her cold clime near the arctic circle, shed a bright light upon all the terrestrial globe." As an unfrocked monk, he was welcomed by the "Reformers," and soon found high favor with them, because of his scurrilous attacks upon the Church; for at that time religious strife was rampant in London. Ambitious to obtain a footing at Oxford, Bruno addressed to the university a *fanfaronade* in the form of an epistle:

"To, the most famous doctors and celebrated Masters
of the University of Oxford,—Salutation from Philotheus

¹ "The Month", London, Vol. III, "Giordano Bruno", p. 573.

Jordanus Brunus of Nola, Doctor of a more scientific theology, professor of a purer and less harmful learning, known in the chief universities of Europe, a philosopher approved and honorably received, a stranger only to the uncivilized and ignoble, an awakener of sleeping minds, a tamer of presumptuous and obstinate ignorance, whom only propagators of folly and hypocrites detest, whom the honorable and studious love, and noble minds applaud, etc.” (loco citato, p. 574.)

But Bruno’s wild and unacceptable theories found no favor at Oxford, and, after a few lectures, the university closed its doors upon him. In anger, he issued a lampoon upon the institution. Oxford was now only

“a widow of true science. Its professors were a constellation of dull pedants, with rings on their fingers, and purple gowns on their shoulders, whose ignorance, presumption, and rustic rudeness would have exhausted the patience of Job, and who knew more of beer than Greek; the students were boorish and dissipated youths, given to drunkenness, debauchery and violence.”

Bruno continued to preach in audacious eloquence in London, but his free-thinking errors, and his virulent attacks on Christianity brought him into disrepute, and, in fine, roused such violent opposition, that in 1585, after a two years’ stay, he was obliged to leave England as hurriedly as he had come.

To assert that the hostile vaporings of an apostate monk, found favor with Shakespeare is to overtax our credulity; for the Poet, as is universally admitted, reveals on every occasion his respect and esteem for monks or friars, and his love and reverence for the Church. Again, if Shakespeare were in London at the time, it seems incredible that, as a poor youth struggling for a livelihood, he should have either the inclination or the opportunity to mingle with the Dons at Oxford in attendance at the lectures of a man whose principles were in opposition to his own. Moreover, the advocates of such a theory must meet the fatal anachronism which stares

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them in the face, and gives the death-blow to their assumptions. Bruno and Shakespeare, it seems, never met in London. During the two years of Bruno's escapades in England, Shakespeare is recorded as suffering persecution at Stratford at the hands of Sir Lucy, the Puritan, whom he later immortalized in satire. Shakespeare reached London only in 1586, the year after Bruno had fled from England, and during the same year the ex-monk passed from France to Germany, to matriculate at the University of Marburg.

If, therefore, for good reasons, Shakespeare never met Bruno, nor attended his lectures, is it nevertheless true that his Hamlet reveals some of Bruno's philosophic principles? What was Bruno's philosophy?² "Was he an Atheist? a Phenomenonist? a Materialist? an Idealist? a Pantheist? Strictly speaking, he was none, and at the same time, he was all of these. That is to say, he maintained all these systems together, but could never determine which he favored most and which least." Even a judge so partial as Lewes, declares that his philosophy has only an historical, not an intrinsic value, and that its condemnation is written in the fact of its neglect.³ As a precursor of the modern Pantheistic school, Bruno taught that the infinite soul of God not merely inhabited the universe, but that the universe was simply a manifestation of Him, and therefore, itself divine. For God and the world are one; since matter and spirit, and body and soul, are the same divine substance under different phases. In the words of Professor Schairp: "Bruno's philosophy reduced human nature to a heap of finely granulated iridescent dust, and emptied man of a soul, and the universe of a God."

If such be Bruno's pantheistic teaching, is it true that Shakespeare was his disciple? Does the Poet destroy man's soul and his personality? Does he confound man with God, and attempt the impossible, by making the finite creature one

² "Brunomania", by L. Previti, S. J., p. 591, and "History of Philosophy", Turner, p. 429.

³ "History of Philosophy", II, 101.

and the same with the infinite Creator? His dramas are all so luminous with arguments to the contrary that none but a Pantheist with mental vision jaundiced can be blind to their effulgence. If the pantheist dreams that "the entire phenomenal universe is nothing but the ever changing existent form of the one single universal substance, which is God; so that God is everything that is, and everything that is, is God," Shakespeare, on the contrary, is awake to the truthful reality of things, and like a true Christian believes in the supernatural revelation of a personal God, who is really and essentially distinct from His creatures. In making man a little less than the angels, God has endowed him with a finite reason and a free will subject to His moral law, which He vindicates by rewarding the virtuous and punishing the reprobate.

If Shakespeare be a Pantheist, then every Christian is a Pantheist. St. Teresa saw in the varied flowers of the fields the beauty of their infinite cause. St. Ignatius of Loyola gazed on the myriad twinkling stars of heaven, and heard them sing in unison the wisdom, and the glory, and the power of their Creator. St. Francis of Assisi, at the sound of whose voice the fishes of the sea and the birds of the air gathered to hear him speak the praises of their Maker, was so imbued with the sense of God's omnipresence as to perceive Him existing in all creatures both animate and inanimate, and to hear them recount His perfections more eloquently than a beautiful creation of art does the artist's skill. St. Paul charged the pagans of Rome with the crime of infidelity:

"For the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made: His eternal power also and Divinity; so that they are inexcusable. Because, when they knew God, they have not glorified Him as God, nor given thanks; but because vain in their thoughts, their foolish heart was darkened: for professing themselves to be wise, they became fools. And they changed the glory of the incor-

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ruptible God, into the likeness of the image of the corruptible man, wherefore God gave them up to the desire of their hearts." Romans, I-19.

But if none of these historic characters is ever recognized as a Pantheist, neither may Shakespeare, who but repeats their Christian ideas. How beautifully he expresses their thoughts in the oft quoted lines:

"And this our life exempt from public haunt,
Finds tongues in trees, books in the running brooks.
Sermons in stones, and good in everything."

The royal Psalmist ages before had sung in rhapsody: "The heavens show forth the glory of God, and the firmament declareth the works of His hands. Day to day uttereth speech. and night to night showeth knowledge." How sublimely this same idea is expressed, and enlarged upon in Shakespeare's beautiful lines:

"Look how the floor of Heaven
Is thick inlaid with patines of bright gold,
There's not the smallest orb which thou beholdest
But in his motion like an angel sings,
Still quiring to the young-eyed Cherubim;
Such harmony is in immortal souls;
But while this muddy vesture of decay
Doth grossly close it in, we can not hear it."

Here the Poet affirms that the music of the spheres, like angel voices, is truly audible in nature, but can be heard by those only who, unenslaved by their gross, corruptible body, rise with the aspiration of their nobler and spiritual self.

Yes, truly, Shakespeare holds the mirror up to nature, and this created nature in its sum of innumerable entities, or creatures, is like an immense mirror which, composed of an untold number of minute parts, reflects, each in itself, some perfection of the Sun of Glory, who in His infinitude of power, is the Great First Cause. Hence, every Christian

⁴ Ps. 18.

imbued with divine faith sees, as Shakespeare did, the perfections of God reflected everywhere. The babbling brooklet, the wavelet murmuring on the sandy shore, and the sonorous cataract, repeat His mysterious name; enchanting scenes, which charm the eye and entrance the fancy, and flowers in wondrous varied species, arrayed in glory more than Solomon's, impress a sense of His inconceivable beauty; earth teeming with multiplied forms of life, and, amid warring elements, ever changing yet ever the same, and working by manifold laws unto one harmonious whole, proclaims His incomprehensible wisdom; the shrieking gale, the terror-striking storm, the frenzied roar of untamed ocean, crashing thunders, quaking earth and smoking mountains, all give voice to His supreme and irresistible power; in fine, the awe-inspiring structure, not made by human hands, whose floors are velvet green, whose walls are snow-capped mountains, whose dome is the ever changing firmament of heaven, "fretted with golden fire," is the grand palace made for man, whereof he is appointed king, and through its naves and aisles he hears re-echoing in tones as of an organ grand, a chorus of voices which chant the love, grandeur and sublime intelligence of its Architect. Everywhere the presence and activity of creatures and their necessary correlation with their Cause, uplift man's mind from self to the great Creator of them all.

Every Christian holds with the "Angelic Doctor"⁵ that the Lord of nature is present in His universe in a threefold manner: He is present in all things by His power, because everything is subject to His sway; He is present in everything by His essence, because, creating and conserving all things, He co-operates in their activity; He is in all things by His presence, because He knows and sees all things. This Christian doctrine is as far from Pantheism as the finite creature is from the infinite Creator. The Pantheist, confusing matter with spirit, soul with body, and God with the world,

⁵ St. Thom. "Summa Theologia", Pars. 1, Quest. VIII, art. 3.

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makes all one and the same divine substance; but the Christian, rejecting this confusion of thought, maintains a distinction real and essential between the Creator and His creatures. He believes in a higher and more sublime *Pan-theism* in as far as all things, though not one and the same with God, yet proclaim as effects the power and magnificence of their Maker. By His power, essence, and knowledge, He is present in all His works; for all things are of Him and by Him, and in Him⁶ and in Him we move, and live, and have our being.⁷ Hence every entity of our universe proclaims His existence, and mirrors forth His perfections, each in its own degree. In this universe He lives and moves as a King in His palace, and, as the Monarch of His realm, directs and governs all things. These truths, and not the crude material Pantheism of Giordano Bruno, were accepted by Shakespeare as is clearly shown by the Christian principles which illumine his works. His views are voiced by a latter poet:

“The sun, the moon, the stars, the seas, the hills and the plains,
Are not these, O Soul, the Vision of Him who reigns?
Speak to Him, thou, for He hears and Spirit with spirit
can meet
Closer is He than breathing, and nearer than hands and feet.”⁸

In the sacred edifice at Stratford, rest Shakespeare's honored remains. There, though he be silent in death, the epitaph on his tomb still eloquently speaks the Christian belief in which he was reared, and in which he died⁹ in the assured hope of a glorious immortality:

“Good friend, for Jesus' sake forebear
To dig the dust enclosed here;
Blest be the man that spares these stones,
And curst be he that moves my bones.”

⁶ Rom. 11, 16.

⁷ Acts 17, 28.

⁸ Tennyson in the “Holy Grail”.

⁹ According to an unbroken tradition recorded by an Anglican clergyman, the Rev. W. Fulman, whose manuscript is preserved at Corpus Christi College, Oxford.

IS HAMLET A PANTHEIST?

This epitaph fulminates in the name of the Christ a dreadful curse against profaners, and as for centuries past, it has preserved his tomb intact, so for centuries to come, it will guard his bones against the desecrating hand of iconoclast and vandal. That Christian epitaph is the poet's voice from the dead, which with emphasis decries any attempt of Agnostic, or Positivist, or Pantheist, to attain his memory with anti-Christian follies and vagaries.

CHAPTER V

Hamlet a Student of Philosophy in Germany

Certain commentators assume that Hamlet studied philosophy at the Protestant University of Wittenberg. The assumption subjectively considered does not seem strange, since these annotators, as adherents of one or other of the religions which originated at the period of the "Reformation," naturally desire the popular hero to attend a Protestant institution; but, if viewed objectively, it appears indeed surprising, because it has no support in the text. It is beyond dispute that Shakespeare places Hamlet, as well as the whole action of the tragedy in the early part of the eleventh century, about the year 1012, when the king of Denmark was suzerain of England; and it is no less clear that he meant the Prince to attend some school of philosophy of his day, and not one that began its existence only five hundred years later.

There were many famous seats of learning in Germany in Hamlet's time, but not one university. That of Wittenberg was founded in 1502 by Frederic the Wise, a Catholic, and later fell under Protestant control. Though religious bias may prompt some annotators to charge the Poet with an anachronism of five centuries, we cannot suppose that a chasm so vast could have escaped his observant eye, especially as the error would confront him in almost every scene of the drama. He may, indeed, justly plead not guilty; for he sends his hero, not to a university at all, but, as expressly stated in the text, "*to school* at Wittenberg."

That many philosophic schools flourished in Germany in the days of Hamlet is an historic fact so well established as

to need no elucidation, save for the common misapprehension concerning education in the Middle Ages. Many histories in our common schools still pander to the unhistoric belief that the pre-reformation period was dark beyond description, and that Luther's "transcendent genius" awoke the world from its lethargic ignorance to a new life of eagerness for learning. To recognize the emptiness of such a view, it is only necessary to recall that the Renaissance with its great revival of classic literature, was in full swing more than one hundred years before the birth of Luther; and that at the time of his apostacy, as vouched for by non-Catholic authorities, there were 76 Catholic universities scattered throughout Europe: 20 in France, 15 in Germany, 15 in Italy, 7 in Spain, 3 in Scotland, 2 in Austria, Switzerland and England respectively. The false view of the state of education in the eleventh century has gained outside the Catholic world an almost universal credence; because, since the time of the "Reformation," English literature has been mainly the product of anti-Catholic writers.

Protestantism has for the last three hundred years been singing in chorus the one song, burdened with the bold and reckless assertion, that modern civilization is the work of the "Reformation." During the same period, historians have, in their hostility to the Church, catered more to popular favor than to historic truth. Comte De Maistre, a French historian and philosopher, affirms that history for the last three hundred years has been a conspiracy against truth. His assertion has been reaffirmed by the Cambridge Modern History, in its first volume on the Renaissance, which further asserts that, if we are to get at the truth, we must go behind all the classic historians, and look up contemporary documents, and evidence, and authorities once more for ourselves. Only in recent times has this conspiracy against truth been discovered and decried by honest non-Catholic writers. With the disintegration of Protestantism under the persistent onslaught of Rationalism, men of every shade of opinion are

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being emancipated from the slavery of religious bias, and, as a consequence, they are beginning to pay homage to truth with the result that a perceptible change has been wrought in the critical character of modern historical research.¹

In exposition of the state of education in the age of Hamlet, a recent non-Catholic author writes:

“From the beginning of the ninth century, all the more famous monasteries had two distinct schools—one for the *oblats*, the other for outsiders. One of the complex causes of the astonishing new birth of Europe was the conversion of the Scandinavian pirates into Christians and civilized Normans. In Germany under the enlightened rule of the Ottos, the symptoms of a better order of things were already to be traced before the middle of the tenth century. Though in a sense the authority of Aristotle was supreme throughout this, as well as the latter medieval period in the formation of scholastic philosophy, the influence of Plato upon European thought counted for at least as much as that of the Stagirite.” H. Rashdall, *The Universities of the Middle Ages*. Vol. 1 C. 2 et passim.

Arthur Leach makes the following remarkable assertion:

“There is not the smallest doubt that the provision for secondary schools was far greater in proportion to population during the Middle Ages than it has ever been since. Every Collegiate Church kept a secondary school, and every Cathedral Church maintained in early days a small university.” *School Supply in the Middle Ages*.

No less an authority than Huxley writes concerning the culture of these schools:

“I doubt if the curriculum of any modern university shows so clear and generous a comprehension of what is meant by culture, as this old Trivium and Quadrivium did.” *Universities actual and ideal: Inaugural Address as Rector of Aberdeen University*.

¹ This emancipation was already enjoyed to some extent before the close of the last century by such famous authors as Hallam, Maitland, Digby, and Drane in England; Guizot and Archey in France; Heeren, Voigt, and Specht in Germany; Betinelli, Andres, and Battini in Italy.

HAMLET A STUDENT IN GERMANY

If Hamlet studied philosophy in Germany, it was at one of these renowned schools. Their wondrous history may be found in detail in a German work of original research.² The great cathedral school at Magdeburg, which had been founded in the year 937 by Otto the Great, attained equal rank with that of Hildesheim. Ludolph Kroppinstedt, who had studied twenty years at Paris, where he was a schoolmate of the famous St. Thomas of Canterbury, was called by archbishop Weigman to take charge of the school. Within its walls, philosophy was taught by the famous master, Gerbert, and by Oterich, a rival professor of equal fame. It attracted students from all parts of Germany, and thither the princes of the empire, as well as the Teutonic knights of Prussia, sent their sons. A rival school was founded in 993 at Hildesheim by the emperor Otto III, who was himself a scholar and a pupil of the renowned Gerbert. It soon acquired eminence, and became illustrious as the principal institution of higher learning in North Germany.

Worthy of note is the fact that in the days of Hamlet, Thietmar, a celebrated priestly scholar and a *countryman of the Prince of Denmark* was at the head of the famous imperial school at Hildesheim. At one or other of these famous institutions of Northern Germany, which were frequented by the sons of kings and princes, Shakespeare, no doubt intended Hamlet to study philosophy. He was, however, unacquainted with the history of learning in Germany in the eleventh century; such a history had not yet been written. But he was aware that at home the university of Oxford, like other universities of Europe, had been the natural outgrowth of pre-existing famous schools, and by analogy he would reasonably infer that the same was the case at Wittenberg. It was the only place of which he knew, and the name was moreover *familiar* to his audience, and that alone was a sufficient reason to send his hero *to school* at Wittenberg.

² "Geschichte des Unterrichtswesens in Deutschland" by Dr. Specht.

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If some, ignoring these very pertinent historic facts, wish, nevertheless, to think that the Poet, enamoured of the "innovations of the Reformers," desired to have the Prince imbued with their doctrines at the Protestant university at Wittenberg, they must not only charge him with an astounding anachronism of five centuries, but also ignore the fact that he makes Hamlet a Catholic; that in his dramas he reveals more than once a dislike for the "Reformers" and their innovations; and more wondrous still, that he fails to cause the Dane to utter even a single word in favor of the doctrines of the new religion, which they suppose him to have imbibed at Wittenberg. On the contrary, Hamlet's thoughts and sentiments, as shall be seen, are in striking harmony with the religious principles, and morals, and philosophy as prevalent in the imperial schools of Northern Germany of the eleventh century.

CHAPTER VI

The Age of Hamlet

The topic of Hamlet's years has given rise to almost as much discussion as the question of the duration of the drama. The Poet deals with the one and the other in the same artful manner. From the opening of the play he seems to convey, in scene after scene, the impression that the Prince, still in the heyday of his youth, is probably not more than twenty or twenty-three years of age. As this skillful legerdemain gives rise to the notion of Hamlet's youthfulness, it is well to consider it before touching upon his actual age.

Ignoring the brief duration of the dramatic action, some critics are led to enlarge unduly on Hamlet's supposed weakness of will, or vacillation. They suppose the action of the tragedy to run on for many months or even a year, and, in consequence, exaggerate the Prince's apparent procrastination. This delusion, says Furness, results from the Poet's skillful method of dealing with the dramatic element of time, a method whereby he conveys, in an artful manner, two opposite ideas: the one of swiftness, and the other of slowness. By one series of illusions, we imagine that the action is driving along in storm, while by the other, we are insensibly beguiled into believing that it extends over many months. Our mind, engrossed by the action of the drama, fails to measure the duration, and accepts without questioning each successive impression as the Poet intended. In illustration, Polonius, who was surely cognizant of the latest court news, expresses as much surprise as Ophelia herself at Hamlet's strange behavior, and yet, from this very interview with his daughter, he goes directly to the king, and speaks of Hamlet's lunacy as a fact well known and of long duration. This and many other instances, which may be multiplied by any careful

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reader, are not inconsistencies or oversights on the part of the Poet. They belong to two series of time, the one suggestive and illusory, and the other visible and directly indicated. These two elements have been called by Halpin, the protractive and the accelerating series, and by Sir Christopher North, the two clocks of Shakespeare. Counting off the time by one of these clocks, some have estimated the duration of the dramatic action at seven or eight days, while others assign at least ten days.¹

It may be reasonably asserted that while the action of the drama may be thus possibly compressed into a period of seven days, nevertheless, from certain data given, one may calculate with some precision that the actual time of the entire drama does not exceed three months, a period of time affording, indeed, scanty room for procrastination in the project of killing a king, under the circumstances in which Hamlet was placed. At the opening of the play, two important events are premised as accomplished; the murder of Hamlet's father and the marriage of his mother. That the former occurred in November and the latter in December, may be inferred from the time of the ghostly apparition; and this time is indicated by Marcellus in the words:

"Some say that ever, 'gainst that season comes
Wherein our Savior's birth is celebrated,
The bird of dawning singeth all night long;
And then, they say, no spirit dare stir abroad;
The nights are wholesome; then no planets strike,
No fairy takes, nor witch hath power to charm,
So hallowed and so gracious is the time."

¹ If Daniel's calculation of time be accepted, the action may, in accordance, be divided into seven respective days, as follows:

First day, - - - Act I, scene I-III.
Second day, - - - Act I, scene IV-V.

Here, is supposed an interruption of less than two months.

Third day, - - - Act II.
Fourth day, - - - Act III, scene I-IV; Act IV, scene I-III.
Fifth day, - - - Act III, scene IV.

At this point, a week or more, is thought to intervene.

Sixth day, - - - Act IV, scene V-VII.
Seventh day, - - - Act V.

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It was not, therefore, till after Christmas-tide that Hamlet heard the secret of the grave from his father's ghost. Before this ghostly visit, and prior to the Christmas season, occurred the queen's marriage, and of its haste the prince complains to Horatio:

“Ham. But what, in faith, make you from Wittenberg?

Hor. My lord, I came to see your father's funeral.

Ham. I pray thee, do not mock me, fellow-student;

I think it was to see my mother's wedding.

Hor. Indeed, my lord, it followed hard upon.

Ham. Thrift, thrift, Horatio! the funeral baked-meats

Did coldly furnish forth the marriage tables.”

Again, in the soliloquy of the same scene, in which Hamlet expresses his strong feelings of disgust at his mother's shameful haste in marrying within a month of his father's death, we learn that Claudius had murdered his brother in the previous month of November:

“Ham. . . . And yet, within a month,—

Let me not think on't,—Frailty, thy name is woman!—

A little month, or ere those shoes were old

With which she followed my poor father's body,

Like Niobe, all tears; why, she, even she—

O God! a beast, that wants discourse of reason,

Would have mourned longer—married with my uncle.”

In the interim, Hamlet's mind was clouded by suspicion, and only after the Christmas season were his fears confirmed by the revelations of his father's ghost. This season must be measured according to the custom which in Hamlet's day was common to Denmark, as well as to all Christendom. Christmastide was then devoted to religious and social functions which, beginning on the eve of Christmas, continued till the festival of Epiphany and its octave. Epiphany, which signifies the manifestation of the Lord, is a solemn festival, celebrated on January the sixth with great religious pomp and ceremony; it is considered the real Christmas of gentile peoples, who as distinct from the Jews, were, in the person

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of the Magi, called by the miraculous star to the knowledge of the "New-born King."

If, therefore, the ghost of Hamlet's father could not, according to the text, bring his message from the grave, till after the Christmas holidays; and, if Christmastide, according to Catholic liturgy, always closes on the octave of the Epiphany, which is January the thirteenth, we have the near date of the ghost's first appearance in the opening of the drama, when in midwinter the lonely sentinels complain of the bitter cold and the shrewdly biting air. It was the month of March following, when Hamlet, in the Third Act, slew Polonius, as is indicated by the words of Ophelia: "I would give you some violets, but they withered all when my father died." Now, if violets bloom in England in March, and wilt in the early part of April, we have again indicated, not only the time of Polonius's death, but also the time of the closing of the drama. Throughout the Fourth and Fifth Acts, which follow closely on Polonius's death, Hamlet was no longer a free agent, but a prisoner of the King; Claudius knew that his own death was intended by the stroke that killed Polonius, and in consequence he kept an anxious and watchful eye upon the Prince, and appointed trusted guards to attend him. The time of the three preceding Acts, beginning towards the middle of January, and continuing till the close of March, runs through a space of little more than two months, and these two months are the sole measure of the delay which is charged to Hamlet's vacillating character.

What did Hamlet do during this time of less than three months? Was he inactive, a dreamer, or a procrastinator, ever immersed in doubt, when duty called to action? None of these was he, even though his Herculean and seemingly impossible task would have staggered the courage and blighted the resolve of many a brave man. To test the verity and veracity of his preternatural visitor; to prepare a play, and instruct the players in an effort to force from the King an

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admission of his guilt; to save his mother's honor, and liberate her soul from an incestuous wedlock; to obtain such evident proof of the guilt of Claudius, as to keep his soul untainted by the crime of regicide; and to preserve his own good name untarnished, and justify his bloody deed in the eyes of all Denmark: all these were included in his purpose; and surely, considering his insuperable difficulties, two months were not too long a time to spend in their accomplishment. They who discredit the Prince's character, by dubbing him a dreamer, a refiner of morals, a vacillator whose overthinking paralyzed his power of action, and all, because he would not murder the king at sight on the unsubstantial word of an immaterial spectre, are refuted by the fact of the insuperable subjective and objective difficulties which confronted him, and in the face of which, "it would have been vice to act, whereas it was virtue to delay."

From Shakespeare's skillful legerdemain, we turn to consider the more important and substantial view, which, on the dramatist's own express testimony, supposes the Prince to have reached the more mature age of thirty years. There should be, it seems, little room for doubt; in the first scene of the last Act, Shakespeare explicitly affirms in the person of the grave-digger, that Hamlet's age is thirty years. If the Prince was born on the same day on which his father overcame Fortinbras; and, if on that same day, the grave-digger entered upon his office, and continued therein for thirty years, we have indisputable evidence of Hamlet's true age:

Ham. How long hast thou been a grave-digger?

First Clown. I came to't that day that our last king
Hamlet overcame Fortinbras.

Ham. How long is that since?

F. Clown. Cannot you tell that? Every fool can tell that:
it was the very day that young Hamlet was born; he
that is mad and sent into England. Why here in
Denmark, I have been sexton here, man and boy,
thirty years.

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Besides this evidence, there are other proofs that the age of thirty, far from being unsuitable to Hamlet, is rather in conformity with the action of the play. Hamlet himself assigns a married life of thirty years to the Player-king and queen; and later, when charging his mother with incestuous marriage, addresses her as a matron of middle age:

“You cannot call it love; for at your age
The heyday in the blood is tame, it’s humble,
And waits upon the judgment.”

Furthermore, throughout the play, Hamlet is seen revealed, a man fully matured in mind, firmly formed in character, and with an habitual tendency to philosophize on every phase of life; qualities, certainly not found in a fledgling youth.

If it be objected that Laertes speaks of Hamlet’s love for Ophelia, as “a violet in the youth of primy nature”; and again, that Polonius calls him “young Hamlet,” the difficulty is rather apparent than real; it depends for solution upon the Poet’s idea of youthfulness, and his idea is seen in various dramas to be very comprehensive. He crowns his favorite prince Hal. as Henry V. at the age of twenty-six, and, nevertheless, pictures him “in the very May morn of his youth.” Moreover, when in *Much Ado about Nothing*, he says in the person of Borachio: “How giddily he turns about all the hot bloods, between fourteen and five and thirty,” he defines his idea of youthfulness, by limiting its extremes to fourteen and thirty-five years. Hamlet’s age, therefore, falling within these extremes, the Poet could correctly picture him as a man still in the heyday of his years.

It is again objected that young noblemen in the Elizabethan era usually left the university under the age of twenty; hence Hamlet must have been in his teens on leaving Wittenberg. But the parity underlying this objection seems untenable. Ignoring the difference of time, it supposes the Denmark of the eleventh century, in which Shakespeare has cast

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the whole drama, to have attained the same degree of civilization, and to have employed that same system of education as flourished in England in the Elizabethan era. "Blackstone's criticism," says Tschischwitz, "is founded on a very erroneous idea of German universities and their arrangements." Records show that students attending institutions of higher learning, in Hamlet's day, and even long after, were with very rare exceptions, all beyond the age of twenty-one years. What, therefore, may be true of conditions of education in the England of Shakespeare's day, is wholly without warrant for Denmark of the eleventh century. Of those days, a chronicler writes: "For fashion sake, some Danes will put their children to school, but they send them not till they are fourteen years of age." It is an historic fact that at that period Denmark being far behind its southern neighbors in civilization, had but few schools, and none for higher education; hence, as already shown, the nobility of Hamlet's time were accustomed to send their sons to the famous schools of Germany to acquire a higher education than a rude civilization could offer them at home. It is reasonable, however, to suppose that considering the hardships and hazards of travel in those days these scions of nobility were not allowed to wander in foreign lands in quest of education, until they had attained the mature age of discretion, self-reliance, and defense.

Certain critics who do not weigh these considerations, seem inclined to compromise the question. They suppose that Shakespeare began in the earlier scenes to portray the Prince in the "very heyday of primy nature," but as the fearful experience which he undergoes in the progress of the drama, so enlivens and stimulates his faculties, as to ripen his character and prematurely develop his intellectual powers, the Poet felt it necessary to smooth away any visible discrepancy

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which might appear between a superbly cultured mind and immaturity of years; and, therefore, near the close of the drama, he adroitly reveals by the mouth of the grave-digger that the Prince has attained the full maturity of thirty years.

CHAPTER VII

Hamlet's Right to the Crown

Prince Hamlet was sole heir to the crown of Denmark, and in the natural order of events, would, at the death of his father, have ascended the throne. In this he was thwarted by the ambition of his uncle. Having acquired the crown through crime and intrigue, Claudius was an interloper, and may be justly considered a usurper. Against this reasonable view several critics take exception. Professor Werder affirms:

“The critics are pleased to assume that Hamlet was the legitimate heir to the throne, his right to which has been wrested from him by a usurper. But where does it stand so written? It is a pure fiction. Hamlet himself never breathes a syllable of complaint.”

This latter assertion is refuted by evidence intrinsic to the play itself; and the former is negatived by showing that Hamlet's right to the crown was real and not fictitious. It is evident from the text that the Prince, contrary to the assertion of Professor Werder, expected to succeed his father on the throne. To his trusted friend, Horatio, Hamlet reveals his disappointed hopes:

“He that hath killed my king, and stained my mother
Popped in between the election and my hopes.”

Again, in the scene where Hamlet strives to arouse his mother to a sense of shame at her incestuous union, he calls the usurper a “cutpurse,” or thief; and so he was, because, during the interregnum he had stolen away the crown:

“A cutpurse of the empire and the rule,
That from a shelf the precious diadem stole,
And put it in his pocket.”

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His disappointed hopes are clearly revealed in Shakespeare's first acting copy of the play:

“What would he do had he my loss?
His father murdered, *a crown bereft him,*
He would turn all his tears to drops of blood,” etc.

In agreement with Professor Werder is Hudson, who maintains his position by a specious argument:

“Whatever there is of hereditary right, belongs to the queen. She was the only child of the former king; and Hamlet's father was brought within the circle of eligibility by his marriage with her. Of course when her first husband died, and she married a second, the second became eligible just as the first had done. So that Claudius, the present king, holds the crown by the same legal title and tenure as Hamlet's father had held it.”

The argumentation offers indeed at first sight an apparently satisfactory proof, but a careful examination discloses the hypothesis to be without foundation. Hamlet, the only child of the reigning house, was the recognized heir apparent, and in an absolute monarchy like the Denmark of his day, became *ipso facto* king on the death of his father. But ambition for the crown had, even before the elder Hamlet's death, impelled Claudius to resort to a deep-laid plot in which after the seduction of the Queen and the murder of her husband, he would marry her, and claim the throne as royal consort. He was favored by every circumstance; he had already gained the Queen with her powerful influence, and in Hamlet's continued absence and ignorance of his purpose, he found it easy to win over the chief men of the nation by intrigue and promises. The plot proved successful. When Hamlet returned for his father's funeral, he was amazed to find his uncle crowned as royal consort by reason of his marriage with the Queen. But was the plea of Claudius valid? Was his espousal of the Queen lawful, or was it

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only putative and criminal? If unlawful, he was then the *de facto*, and Hamlet the *de jure* King.

The question therefore turns upon the validity or nullity of the marriage. The point is important; it affects the whole action of the drama, the relationship of the principal characters, and gives force to the term, "adulterous" and "incestuous," with which Hamlet reproaches his mother, as well as to the shame which he feels at her disgrace. Though the Prince's view is for Catholic readers most decisive, it seems not so clear to others whose judgment is influenced by loose notions concerning matrimony, notions which, first introduced into Christendom with the birth of the "Reformation," have in the course of time become more and more lax.

The legality of the marriage, it is clear, must be judged according to the laws which prevailed in the eleventh as well as in the sixteenth century, and not by the modern notions of the twentieth. In the time of Shakespeare's Hamlet, all Europe was Catholic, or Jewish, or infidel, and the Catholic code of morals was supreme in public and private life. Then a marriage was valid only when contracted according to the canons which governed the social and religious life of the Denmark of those times; hence, Hamlet, Claudius, Gertrude, and the Ghost, all considered the marriage in question to be incestuous as the drama shows, and the audiences of Shakespeare were of the same belief. Matrimony, it is true, was reduced to a mere contract by the "Reformers" of the sixteenth century, but in the eleventh it was, as it still is in the Catholic world, a contract which the "New Lawgiver" raised to the dignity and sanctity of a sacrament, and as such it is subject to the spiritual authority of His Church. In consequence, she has always regulated the administration of this sacrament, and safeguarded it by laws against desecration. These laws are designed to prevent crime, to protect married people in their rights, to guard

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the sanctity of the sacrament, to maintain public and private morality, and so promote the common good.

Of these laws, known as canonical impediments, some are called *diriment*, because by their annulling force they make null and void any marriage which the parties concerned may attempt. Their fundamental idea is contained in the Levitical law, and in ancient canonical texts. Some arise from the Divine law, and others, while suggested by the natural and Divine law, are ecclesiastical enactments. Three of these impediments directly affected Claudius, and in fact any one of them sufficed to invalidate his attempted marriage with the Queen. The first was the law that prohibited one from marrying his deceased brother's wife without a dispensation.¹ It was a law which was rarely dispensed from by the spiritual court, and only for the gravest reasons; but ambition for the crown was not a sufficient cause to invalidate the law in the case of Claudius; since the crown prince was capable of ascending the throne, and besides there remained other impediments to the marriage.

If then it is evident from the drama that Claudius obtained no dispensation to legalize his marriage, did he, like the English Bluebeard, defy the moral law and fall under the ban of the spiritual authority recognized in the realm? Such a supposition is far from probable. The solution of the difficulty is rather found in the situation of Claudius and in his character. On the one hand, the Church which alone could act in the matter had in Denmark no representative with sufficient power to derogate from the law. It was still a missionary country under the jurisdiction of the metro-

¹ The diriment impediment of marriage with a deceased brother's wife was in force through the whole Church from the earliest times. It is expressly mentioned in several councils of the 6th and 7th centuries, e. g. the 1st Council of Orleans (511); Auvergne (535); 3rd C. of Orleans (538); 3rd C. of Paris (557); 5th C. of Paris (614). The law was retained by the State Church of England until recently, when it was abolished by an act of Parliament. At the time several Anglican bishops protested against the innovation; but their objections were inconsistent and futile, since their official position as well as their religion were the creations of the same supreme power of Parliament.

politan of Hamburg, and therefore any action would by reason of distance, as well as of legal forms, necessarily involve delay. Claudius, on the other hand, knew that the success of his plot depended upon his hasty marriage. He could not in prudence await the lengthy time required for a dispensation. In fact he could brook no delay; for Hamlet was hastening homeward, and would, no doubt, attempt to frustrate his design. It was, therefore, urgent that the marriage, as well as the coronation ceremony be accomplished before the Prince had set foot in Denmark. If the members of the council had scruples concerning the impediment, an evil character like Claudius would consider them as nothing worth. He had committed horrid crimes with the view of satiating his ambition. Was it likely now, when the crown was within his reach, that he would balk at a lesser offence? His characteristic cunning and duplicity impelled him to resort to a convenient equivocation. The claim that he had, or was obtaining, the necessary dispensation for a legal marriage would not only satisfy scrupulous officials but also quell popular opposition. His action is paralleled by that of the English Uxoricide in 1533. Five years had rolled away since Henry first solicited a divorce, three, since he began to cohabit with Anne Boleyn. But when he discovered his mistress to be in a condition to promise him an heir, he decided upon a secret marriage. When Dr. Lee, the royal chaplain, made some opposition, Henry calmed his priestly scruples with the assurance that Clement VII. had granted him a divorce from Catherine, and that the papal document was safely deposited in his closet.²

It is clearly shown in the course of the drama that Claudius did not legalize his marriage. He knew that any attempt would be futile; for though the first impediment, that of marrying his deceased brother's wife, were removed, his marriage with the Queen was still barred by a second and

² "Lingard's History of England", Vol. V, p. 3. Edinburgh Edition, 1902.

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third law which were of even greater moment. The second concerned the criminal seduction of a consort on the promise of marriage after the death of the husband.³ It prohibited and nullified the marriage of the adulterer even after the death of the innocent party. This second impediment was a secret of Claudius and Gertrude, who closely guarded it, unaware of its disclosure to Hamlet by his father's ghost:

“Ay, that incestuous, that adulterous beast,
With witchcraft of his wit, with traitorous gifts,—
O wicked wit and gifts, that have the power
So to seduce!—won to his shameful lust
The will of my most virtuous Queen.”

The third impediment was a law which prohibited and nullified the marriage of the man who murdered the husband of his accomplice in adultery in order to marry her. This impediment of crime was unknown to the Queen, and remained a secret to Claudius alone until revealed to the Prince by his ghostly visitant:

“’Tis given out that, sleeping in my orchard,
A serpent stung me; so the whole ear of Denmark
Is by a forged process of my death
Rankly abused; but know, thou noble youth,
The serpent that did sting thy father's life
Now wears his crown.”

A criminal like Claudius, long debauched in conscience, gave little heed to these impediments which hopelessly barred his legal union with the Queen. As long as his crimes were securely locked in the secret of his own heart, his marriage would appear real to the citizens of Denmark, and, in consequence, seem no debarment from the throne.

Since Hamlet's right to the crown depends upon the

³ The 2nd impediment dates back to the earlier Christian centuries. It is found in the preserved records of the Council of Triburien (895), in several collections of Canon Law, such as those of Regino, Burchard, Ivo, and the famous Sum or Abridgment of Canon Law made by Gratian in 1140. The work consists not only of the decrees of councils and popes down to Innocent II, but also of passages from the Scripture, from the Fathers, and even from the Roman Law.

validity of his mother's marriage with Claudius, it appears strange that of the many commentators only one has touched upon the question. Professor Trench admits that the marriage was invalid, but his conclusion, though true, is based on premises which every Catholic knows to be erroneous. "The case of Gertrude," he says, "is precisely parallel with that of Catherine of Aragon."⁴ Their cases, however, far from being parallel, exhibit a great disparity. Both should be judged according to the ecclesiastical canons which prevailed at the time, and which governed the sacramental marriage contract. Gertrude obtained no dispensation from the three impediments which nullified her marriage, while Catherine was canonically freed from the one barrier to her union with Henry.

But, continues the Professor: "Such a union (with a deceased husband's brother) was illicit to the English people." Yes, in the case of Gertrude, but not in that of Catherine. The marriage of the former was from the first considered invalid and criminal; that of the latter, sanctioned by the religion of Christendom, was valid in the eyes of the English nation and of Henry himself, until after eighteen years of wedded life, he unfortunately fell under the fascination of a beautiful and vivacious maid of honor in the Queen's household. When his overtures to Anne Boleyn were spurned save on the promise of marriage, he began under the influence of his criminal passion to feel scruples concerning the validity of his union with Catherine. But these pretended scruples deceived no one; and their hollowness was a common subject for jesting among his courtiers. This fact is well exemplified by Shakespeare's ironical allusions in the person of sundry nobles:

Lord Cham. It seems the marriage with his brother's wife
Has crept too near his conscience.
Duke of Suffolk. No, his conscience
Has crept too near another lady.

⁴ W. T. Trench: "Shakespeare's Hamlet", A New Commentary, London, 1903, p. 54.

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Duke of Norfolk. 'Tis so:

He counsels a divorce; a loss of her
That, like a jewel, has hung twenty years
About his neck, yet never lost her luster,
Of her that loves him with that excellence
That angels love good men with, even of her
That when the greatest stroke of fortune falls,
Will bless the King; and is not this course pious?

Lord Cham. Heaven keep me from such counsel; 'Tis
most true

These news are everywhere; every tongue speaks 'em,
And every true heart weeps for 't; all that dare
Look into these affairs see this main end."

(Hen. VIII. 2. ii.)

Professor Trench further intimates that the audiences of Shakespeare adjudged the marriage of Catherine to be as void as Gertrude's; "for if it were not so, Queen Elizabeth would have had little right to occupy the throne."⁵ Such an opinion is discredited by the history of the times.⁶ Though the statute by which Elizabeth had been pronounced illegitimate was still in force, she ascended the throne without opposition. Of her right there could be no doubt. It had been established by the statute for the thirty fifth Henry VIII.⁷ and nothing, therefore remained for the two houses but to recognize the accession of the new sovereign. She was welcomed by both the Catholic and Protestant parties. The former believed that her conversion to the ancient faith which she professed during the reign of her sister, was real and sincere; the latter, while lamenting her apostacy, persuaded themselves that her sentiments were feigned. "It is probable that, in her own mind, she was indifferent to either form of worship; but her ministers, whose prospects depended on the

⁵ Ibidem, p. 257.

⁶ "Lingard's History of England", Vol. VI, c. I.

⁷ "Henry's many marriages and divorces had so complicated the question of the succession, that Parliament, to avoid disputes after Henry's death, had given him power to settle the matter by will. This he did, directing that the crown should descend to his son Edward and his heirs; in case Edward dies childless, it was to go to Mary and her heirs, and then to Elizabeth and her heirs." Myers' "Mediaeval and Modern History", p. 415. See also Lingard's "History of England", Vol. V, p. 225.

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change, urged their mistress to reject and proscribe the religion which proclaimed her a bastard, and to support the reformed doctrines which alone could give stability to her throne.⁸

If the drama does not enter upon antecedent details, it is because it already presupposes three accomplished facts: the murder of Hamlet's father, the incestuous marriage of Claudius, and the Prince defrauded of the crown. To make the drama retroactive would retard the action of a tragedy already overcrowded with incidents, and give too great a prominence to Claudius to the detriment of the main character. Shakespeare does, however, emphasize more than once the all-important fact that the marriage of Claudius was only putative or supposed, and therefore null and void, and this fact he would impress upon our minds by frequent repetitions. Hence, he causes Hamlet to speak of it so often as a matter of deep grief, to charge his mother with criminal conduct, to implore her to abandon her unholy and shameful union with his uncle:

Queen. O, Hamlet, speak no more!

Thou turn'st mine eyes into my very soul,
And there I see such black and grained spots
As will not leave their tinct.

Hamlet. Nay, but to live
Stew'd in corruption,—

Queen. O, speak to me no more!
These words, like daggers, enter into mine ears,
No more, sweet Hamlet!

Hamlet. Confess thyself to heaven;
Repent what's past, avoid what is to come;
And do not spread the compost on the weeds,
To make them ranker.

Queen. O, Hamlet, thou hast cleft my heart in twain.

Hamlet. O, throw away the worser part of it,
And live the purer with the other half.
Good night! But go not to mine uncle's bed;
Assume a virtue if you have it not.

⁸ Lingard — Ibidem.

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The Poet even causes the King himself, when attempting repentance, to confess the futility of hope of pardon, unless he restore the crown and abandon his criminal union :

“Forgive me my foul murder
That cannot be; since I am still possess’d
Of those effects for which I did the murder,
My crown, mine own ambition and my Queen.
May one be pardoned and retained the offence?”

If then from the play itself, it is evident that the marriage of Claudius is incestuous and unlawful, and in fact no marriage, it can confer on him no claim nor right to the throne ; and, in consequence, if he be *de facto* king, he is not so *de jure*, and must, therefore, be considered an imposter and actual usurper.

CHAPTER VIII

The Real or Assumed Madness of Hamlet

The mooted question of the Prince's sanity has divided the readers of Shakespeare into two opposing schools; the one defending a feigned, and the other an unfeigned madness. The problem arises from the Poet's unrivalled genius in the creation of characters. So vivid were his conceptions of his ideal creations that, actually living and acting in them, he gives them an objective existence in which they seem living realities, or persons walking among us, endowed with our human emotions and passions, and subject to the vicissitudes of our common mortality. The confounding of this ideal with the real has given rise to two divergent schools. The critics of the one, unmindful of the fact that Hamlet is wholly an ideal existence, are accustomed to look upon him as real and actual as the men they daily meet in social intercourse, and accordingly judge him as they would a man in ordinary life. The other school, ignoring the different impersonations of Hamlet upon the public stage, considers him only as an ideal existence, and places the solution of the problem in the discovery of the dramatist's intention in the creation of the character.

The Poet with consummate art has so portrayed the abnormal actions of a demented mind, and so truly pictured all the traits of genuine madness, even in its minutest symptoms, that a real madman could not enact the character more perfectly. Conscious of his skill in this portrayal so true to life, he has in consequence depicted the court of Claudius divided in opinion on Hamlet's feigned or unfeigned madness, just as the Shakespearean world is divided

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to-day. To say that the Queen, and Polonius, and others thought him mad, is no proof of his real madness; but only that by his perfect impersonation he succeeded in creating this belief; and that such was his purpose is clear from the play. If the court firmly believed in the dementia of the Prince, Claudius, who was of a deeper and more penetrating mind and an adept in crafty cunning, stood firm in his doubt from the first. The consciousness of his guilt made him alert and, like a criminal ever fearing detection, he suspected the concealment of some evil design under Hamlet's mimic madness. If to-day we find eminent physicians standing with Polonius and the Queen in the belief of Hamlet's real madness, we see on the opposite side others with the astute king and an overwhelming majority of Shakespeare's readers. That many physicians should deem the Prince's madness a reality is nothing surprising. We know the celebrated legal cases in which medical specialists of the highest rank were divided in judgment on the sanity or insanity of the man on trial.

Let a man mimic madness as perfectly as Hamlet, and be summoned to court on trial of his sanity. If it be shown by judicial evidence, that before beginning to enact the role of madman, he had never throughout his life exhibited the least symptom of dementia, but, on the contrary, was known as a man of a sound and strong mind; if it be shown that before assuming the antics of a madman, he had actually summoned his trusted friends, informed them of his purpose, cautioned them against betrayal, and even sworn them to secrecy; if it be proved that on every occasion, when moving among his intimate friends, he is consistently sane, and feigns madness only in presence of those who, he fears, will thwart his secret design; and if it be shown on reputable testimony that he entered upon his course of dementia to guard an incommunicable secret, and to shield himself in the pursuit of a specified end, difficult

and dangerous of attainment; such a man on such evidence would in open court be declared beyond all doubt sane and sound of mind by the unanimous verdict of any specially impanelled jury.

The mad role that Hamlet plays to perfection, is certainly a proof of Shakespeare's genius, but by no means a proof of the insanity of the Prince, unless we be prepared to maintain that no one save a madman can simulate dementia. If, as Lowell has well remarked, Shakespeare himself without being mad, could so observe and remember all the abnormal symptoms of insanity as to reproduce them, why should it be beyond the power of an ideal Hamlet, born into dramatic life, to reproduce them in himself any more than the many tragedians, who, since Shakespeare's day, have so successfully mimicked the madness of the Prince upon the public stage?

The perfect portrayal of Hamlet's mad role has been ascribed to the unaided genius of Shakespeare. The character, it is thought, is nothing more than the outward expression of the Poet's subjective and purely mental creation. Such a notion, while highly magnifying the powers of the artist, is, however, contrary to psychological facts. Our ideas are mental images of things perceived by the senses. They depend upon their objective realities no less than does an image upon the thing which it images. The dictum of Aristotle: "There are no ideas in our intellect which we have not derived from sense perception," has become an axiom of rational philosophy. If then all natural knowledge originates in sense perception, Shakespeare's perfect knowledge of the symptoms of insanity was not the product of his imagination alone, but was due to his observation of these symptoms existing in real human beings. His portrayal is admittedly true to nature, and it is true to nature, because a reflex or reproduction of what he himself had witnessed in demented unfortunates. This fact has

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been placed beyond reasonable doubt by a legal document which was recently discovered in the Roll's Office, London.¹ From it we learn that Shakespeare lived on Muggleton Street, directly opposite a medical college near which was an insane asylum. Here, by studying the antics of the inmates, he had every opportunity to draw from nature, when engaged in the creation of his mad characters. It is therefore more reasonable to infer that his accurate knowledge of traits which are common to the demented was not solely the product of his imagination, but rather the result of his studied observations of individual cases.

Since Hamlet then on the testimony of medical experts exhibits accurately all the symptoms of dementia, the question of his real or pretended madness can be solved only by ascertaining the intention of the Poet. We may safely assume that a dramatist so renowned in his art has not left us in darkness concerning a factor most important in this drama. In our doubt we may turn for light to other dramas wherein he portrays demented characters with equal skill. Nowhere can we find more striking elements of contrast and resemblance than in Lear and Ophelia. The grandeur of Lear in his sublime outbursts of a mighty passion, differs surprisingly from the pathetic inanities of the gentle Ophelia; yet Shakespeare leaves no doubt of the genuine madness of the one and the other. In Lear, supreme ingratitude, blighting the affections of a fond and over-confiding parent, has wrecked his noble mind; in Ophelia, the loss of a father by the hand of a lover, whose "noble and most sovereign reason" she has seemingly blasted by rejecting his importunate suit, has over-powered her feelings, and left her "divided from herself and her fair judgment, without the which we're pictures, or mere beasts."

¹ The document is a record of a lawsuit of a Huguenot family with whom Shakespeare boarded, and in whose interest he appeared several times as a sworn witness in court.

Both Lear and Ophelia are portrayed as genuinely mad and nevertheless, unlike Hamlet, they disclose no purpose or design in their madness, nor seek to conceal the cause of their distress. On the contrary they always have on their lips utterances which directly or indirectly reveal the reason of their mental malady.

Far otherwise is it with Edgar and with Hamlet. Hence, a comparison of the nature of their madness may be a flash of light in darkness. Both are pictured as feigning madness. If Edgar, the victim of a brother's treachery, enacts in his banishment the role of a fool with a perfection which eludes discovery; so does Hamlet, the victim of his uncle's treachery, deceive by his mimic madness all but the crafty King. Both, unlike Lear and Ophelia, enter upon their feigned madness for an expressed specific purpose, and both, far from revealing the real cause of their grief, are ever on the alert to conceal it; because its discovery would frustrate the object of their pursuit. As in the drama of Lear, the Poet has left no possible doubt of the real madness of the king, and of the feigned insanity of Edgar, so also we may reasonably expect to find in his *Tragedy of Hamlet*, not only clear proofs of Ophelia's madness, but also, sufficient indications of the Prince's feigned dementia.

The first of these indications is the fact that the assumed madness of Hamlet is in conformity with the original story, as told in the old runic rhymes of the Norsemen. Considering moreover the exigencies of the plot and counterplots, the role of madman seems evidently forced upon him. As soon as he had recovered from the terrible and overpowering agitation of mind and feelings with which the ghostly revelation had afflicted him, he realized that the world had changed about him; that he himself had changed, and that he could no longer comport himself as before at the court of Claudius. This change, he feels he cannot fully conceal, and, therefore, welcomes the thought of hiding his real

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behind the mask of a madman. But he must play his role, not indifferently, but with such perfection of truthful reality as to deceive the whole court, and above all, if possible, his arch-enemy, the astute and cunning King. With this in view, the dramatist had of necessity to portray the hero's madness with all the traits of a real affliction; for, if the court could discover Hamlet's madness to be unreal, his design and purpose would be thereby defeated.

It seems evident that the Poet in the very concept of the plot and its development, intended, in the portrayal of Hamlet's antic disposition, to produce the impression of insanity, and, nevertheless, by a flashlight here and there, to expose to us the truth as known alone to himself and to Hamlet's initiated friends. Throughout the first Act, wherein the Prince is pictured in acute mental grief at the loss of his loved father and the shameful conduct of his mother, there is nothing even to suggest the notion of dementia. It is only after the appalling revelations of the ghost, which exposed the secret criminals and his own horrid situation that he resolved to wear the mask of a madman in the furtherance of his suddenly formed plan of "revenge." Hence, at once confiding his purpose to his two trusted friends and swearing them to secrecy, he begins to play the part and to impress upon the court the notion of his lunacy.

Had Shakespeare failed to shed this strong light upon Hamlet's purpose, he would certainly have left room for doubt; but not satisfied with this, he scatters through the drama other luminous marks, to guide our dubious path. A strong mark is found in the many soliloquies in which the Prince, giving way to the intensity of his feelings, expresses the inmost thoughts of his heart; in them were surely offered ample opportunities to expose, here and there, some trace of his supposed affliction. But it is remarkably strange that never, like the insane, does he lapse in his fr-

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quent monologues into irrelevant and incoherent speech, nor use incongruous and inane words. Another luminous index is Hamlet's intercourse with his school-fellow and sole bosom friend, the scholarly Horatio. The Prince throughout takes him into his confidence, and Horatio, therefore, surely knew his mental condition; yet in mutual converse, whether in public or in private, he always supposes his friend to be rational, and never, by any sign or word, does he manifest friendly sentiment of sorrow or of sympathy, as he naturally would, if ignorant of the feigned madness of Hamlet. Horatio is well aware that everyone assumes his friend to be demented, and, nevertheless, because true to him and to his sworn promise of secrecy, he does nothing to dispel, but rather lends himself to sustain the common delusion. Another striking indication is the Prince's treatment of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. After worming out their secret mission from the King, Hamlet partly lifts the veil for us in the words:

Ham. But my uncle-father and aunt-mother are deceived.

Guil. In what my dear lord?

Ham. I am but mad north-north-west; when the wind is southerly, I know a hawk from a handsaw."

Again, Hamlet's instruction to the players, his cautious direction to Horatio, as well as his skillful intermittent play of madness when in the same scene he addresses Horatio, Ophelia, the King, and Polonius, display, not only a sane, but also a master mind, versatile in wit, and ready to meet cunning subterfuge with artifice at every point. If he were really mad, he could never have preserved such perfect consistency in word and action towards so many people under rapid change of circumstances; always sane in dealing with his friends, and always simulating madness in presence of those whom he mistrusted. Once he was obliged to raise his vizor in presence of his mother. It was in the formal inter-

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view, when she sought to shelter herself against his merciless moral onslaught by asserting his madness. But by unmasking himself he baffled her, and proceeded in a terrible but righteous wrath to lacerate her dormant conscience, till he awakened her to the shameful sense of her criminal state and to manifest contrition.

An objection to Hamlet's sanity is sometimes seen in his own alleged confession of madness. He seeks pardon, they say, from Laertes for his violence against him on the plea of madness. This objection is rather an argument to the contrary; for insane persons are never known to plead insanity in self-exculpation. The objection, moreover, is not valid, because it is based upon a misinterpretation of the word *madness*. The madness of which Hamlet speaks in the present instance and which he pleads in excuse, is not a fixed mental malady, but what in common parlance is a madness synonymous with a sudden outburst of anger, in which self-control is lost for the moment. Such was the madness of Hamlet, when in sudden anger he slew Polonius, and again, when at Ophelia's grave, his mighty grief was roused to wrathful expression by the unseemly and exaggerated show of Laertes.

All these indications scattered through the drama are intermittent flashes, which, amid the darkness of doubt, illumine the objective truth of Hamlet's feigned madness. But there is still another and independent truth which, though already alluded to by a few eminent critics, merits here a fuller consideration. This truth grows to supreme importance when viewed in relation to Shakespeare and his dramatic art. A little reflection on the nature and principles of art will engender a repugnance to any theory of Hamlet's real madness. Art is the expression of the beautiful, and dramatic poetry is a work of art, and like every other art it has its canons and its principles. If poetry be the language of passion and of enlivened imagination; if its purpose be to

afford intellectual pleasure by the excitement of agreeable, and elevated, and pathetic emotions; this certainly is not accomplished by holding up to view the vagaries of a mind stricken with dementia. The prime object of tragic poetry is to expose some lofty and solemn theme so graphically that its very portrayal will awaken in our moral nature a love of virtue and a detestation of vice. This verily is not effected by delineating the mad antics of some unfortunate whose disordered mind leaves him helpless to the mercy of the shifting winds of circumstances, and irresponsible to the moral laws of human life. No spectator can discover in the portrayal of the irrational actions of a madman an expression of the beautiful. It gives no intellectual pleasure, stirs no pleasing emotion, and engenders no love of virtue and hatred of vice.

Nothing, it is true, may be so abhorrent to our world of existences, but may, in some form or other, be brought under the domain of art. "Men's evil passions have given tragedy to art; crime is beautified by being linked to an avenging Nemesis; ugliness is clothed with a special form of art in the grotesque." Even pain and suffering become attractive in the light of heroism which endures them in the cause of truth and justice. In consequence, the dramatist enjoys the privilege of portraying characters of every hue, of mingling the ignoble with the noble, and of picturing life in all its varied forms, with the view that the contemplation of such characters will excite pleasure or displeasure, and moral admiration or aversion in every healthy mind. This is true only when these characters are not pitiable mental wrecks, but agents free, rational, and responsible. A healthy mind can find nothing but displeasure and revulsion of feeling at the sorry sight of a fellow-being whose reason is dethroned, and who as a mere automaton concentrates in his mental malady the chief elements of the tragedy and its development of plot. A drama so constructed is intellectually and morally repugnant to human nature. Rob the hero of intelligence

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and consciousness of moral responsibility, and you make the work devoid of human interest and leave it wholly meaningless. Such an unfortunate should not be paraded before the public gaze in defiance of the common feelings of humanity; but in all kindness, be relegated to the charitable care of some home or refuge.

In brief: Hamlet is the tragedy; deprive him of reason and there remains no tragic motive. All is, however, changed by the admission of his feigned madness. His sanity admitted, the drama becomes at once magnificent and inspiring, and, by a master-stroke of genius, shines forth in a new and wondrous light, possessing a tragic motive, supremely instructive and thrilling in the sad wreck of a nature noble and grand in soul, and rich in rare endowments of mind and body.

CHAPTER IX

Hamlet's Alleged Defect of Character

Another mystery of the tragedy that baffles many readers is the apparent vacillation which the hero exhibits in obeying the command of the ghost. Its solution has divided all commentators into two opposing subjective and objective schools. The former, which has until recent times held almost undisputed sway, attributes the reasons for Hamlet's delay solely to personal and temperamental difficulties, and maintains that any solution of the mystery must involve weakness of will as the key to the mystery. Its adherents, however, do not agree upon the precise cause of Hamlet's vacillation. Some accept the 'sentimental' theory as expounded by Goethe:

“A lovely, pure, noble, and most moral nature, without the strength of nerve which forms heroes, sinks beneath a burden which it cannot bear, and must not cast away. All duties are holy to him; the present is too hard. Impossibilities have been required of him; not in themselves impossibilities, but such for him. Shakespeare's intention was to exhibit the effects of a great action imposed as a duty upon a mind unfit for its accomplishment. A pure and highly moral disposition without energy of soul that constitutes a hero sinks under the load which it cannot support nor resolve to abandon.”

The fundamental principle of this theory, says Professor Bradley,¹ has been so isolated, developed, and popularized as to give us a picture of a graceful youth, sweet and sensitive, full of delicate sympathies and yearning aspirations, shrinking from the touch of everything gross and earthly; but frail and weak, a kind of Werther, with a face like Shelley, and a voice like Mr. Tree's. Looking at such a picture, we feel instinctively a tender pity, and ask, how Ham-

¹ 'Shakespearean Tragedy', p. 101.

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let can perform the terrible duty laid upon him? How foolish, indeed, was the ghost even to suggest such an idea! This theory is too kind to Hamlet on the one side, and quite unjust to him on the other. For the sentimental Hamlet the reader can feel only pity not unmingled with contempt.

Others find more acceptable the "Conscience Theory," as excogitated by Ulrici:

"In Hamlet, we should behold the Christian struggling with the natural man, and its demand for revenge. The natural man spurs him on to immediate action, and charges his doubts with cowardice and irresolution; the Christian spirit — though, indeed, as a feeling rather than as a conviction — draws him back, though still resisting. He hesitates and delays, and tortures himself with a vain attempt to reconcile these conflicting impulses and between them to preserve his own liberty of will and action . . . the mind of Hamlet . . . is throughout struggling to retain the mastery which the judgment ought invariably hold over the will."²

Others prefer to follow the 'Weakness of Will Theory' as presented by Schlegel and Coleridge:

"In Hamlet, Shakespeare seems to have wished to exemplify the moral necessity of a due balance between our attention to the objects of our senses and our meditation on the working of our minds,—an *equilibrium* between the real and the imaginary worlds. In Hamlet, this balance is disturbed; hence we see a great and an almost enormous, intellectual activity, and a proportionate aversion to real action consequent upon it, with all its symptoms and accompanying qualities. This character Shakespeare places in circumstances under which it is obliged to act on the spur of the moment. Hamlet is brave and careless of death; but he vacillates from sensibility, and procrastinates from thought, and loses the power of action in the energy of resolve."

This theory has been the most widely accepted view in the English-speaking world. But against it may be very well

² "Shakespeare's Dramatische Kunst".

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neath the wildness of his youth his friends discover them as soon as he mounts the throne. What they say of him is verified in Hamlet:

Hear him but reason in divinity,
And all admiring with an inward wish
You would desire the King were made a prelate;
Hear him debate of commonwealth affairs
You'll say it hath been all in all his study;
List his discourse of war, and you shall hear
A fearful battle rendered you in music;
Turn him to any course of policy
The Gordian Knot of it he will unloose
Familiar as his garter; that when he speaks,
The air, a chartered libertine, is still,
And the mute wonder lurketh in men's ears
To steal his sweet and honeyed sentences.

Further, Prince Hal is opposed to the impatient Hotspur and is anxious to try his skill in arms with him. Like Hamlet he does not think much of himself, and cares little for mere reputation. Hotspur like Laertes is hot tempered, oversensitive of personal honor, lacks self-control, and is wholly wanting in equipoise of character. Prince Hal like Hamlet holds his true self well-guarded in reserve, and consorts for a time with Falstaff and his crew, as Hamlet does with the Players. Henry is eminently a religious and conscientious man, and hesitates to involve two nations in bloodshed until he is fully assured of the justice of his cause. In like manner Hamlet delays the bloody work of "revenge" till he obtains unequivocal and tangible proofs of his uncle's guilt. Henry, however, is not without his gloomy hours, nor is he always in the vein for doffing the world aside. His picture sketches in outline the very image of Prince Hamlet:—

For he is gracious, if he be observed;
He hath a tear for pity and a hand
Open as day for melting charity;
Yet notwithstanding, being incensed, he's flint,
As humorous as winter and as sudden
As flows congealed in the spring of day,

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His temper, therefore, must be well observed
Chide him for faults, and do it reverently,
When you perceive his blood inclined to mirth;
But being moody, give him line and scope.

Such a prince, if harassed by deep mental grief, would easily fall a victim to gloom and melancholy.

Though with the opening of the play, Hamlet be enveloped in gloom and afflicted with grief, which induce a great and continued depression of spirits, it is clear that his natural temperament was far from melancholic. He is characterized as refined and courteous, princely in dignity and royal in manners, in form prepossessing, in temperament imaginative, in feelings sensitive and generous, and with a deep sense of propriety and respect for the moral order of things. Adorned with virtuous qualities and a wisdom uncommon to his years, he was before his father's death, unacquainted with dishonor, vice, and the sorrows of life, and lived enamored of the beauties of nature and the goodness and happiness in humanity around him.

In those happier days, his was not the life of a mere student, nor was he peculiarly addicted to moody reflection, nor indisposed to action, but on the contrary, his must have been other qualities such as are loved and admired by the masses, and which won for him popular favor, and in fact made him the idol of Denmark. All know him to love and admire him. To the valiant Fortinbras he was a soldier, nor did he lose his love for military skill even in his saddest and gloomiest days. To Ophelia and the court, who knew him more intimately, he was, moreover, a scholar and a courtier, the pride of the state, "the glass of fashion and the mould of form, the observed of all observers."

From certain hints in the play and from logical inferences, we may reasonably surmise what was Hamlet's natural disposition. In other and sunny days, when unstricken by affliction, he was not prone to gloomy and brooding thoughtfulness.

ness, which is characteristic of his nature, nor were his the mental qualities which moderate emotion, which moderate the choleric which is fiercer than the sanguine. On the contrary, he was a man of a nature which his mother could not have been over her golden countenance, and commendable." "Then only under extraordinary such occasions his character was thrown into a feverish excitement, and he became a true antagonist. This he was.

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His nature was of a kind which is characteristic of his mental activity, and of a quality produced by his genius, to lead him to the end and to give him a charming confidence, vivacity and energy which notwithstanding his inclinations to such some let fall gloom and the

the witty comparisons and these sorrow, he turns for with every visitor. His which betoken his de- morous jest, nor play eds in the absurdities is depressing gloom res- sible traits of his ssed, is not over-

dence. At every y overpowers his y trying circum- ends to secrecy, ed disposition ghastly revela- catch the con- veracity of he meditates he mastered, re of the ns of its

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sincerity. In hatred of mere show he decries the hypocritical mourning of Claudius and Gertrude. His esteem of true worth prompts him to seek the friendship of a scholar who though poor is honest and sincere, and his contempt for everything pretentious leads him to dislike and ridicule Polonius and Osric. Impatient of distinctions of rank and wealth, he loves Ophelia, treats the Players as honored courtiers, and sees no real difference between Kings and beggars. An aversion to the false sharpens his shafts of irony against Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's betrayal of friendship, against Ophelia's theatrical part and lie in the "espials," and her use of cosmetics and artificial adornments. His indignation at the dishonor cast upon his sincere love by Polonius, and its apparent belief by his intended, is scarcely masked, and irritates him to words of withering scorn against the "foolish prating knave."

Hamlet was affectionate by nature. Characteristically generous and devoid of suspicion, he was accustomed to appreciate every one at his best. This is revealed in his gracious and warm reception of the young spies and in his inability to discern the cause of Laertes' anger. He professes to have "loved him ever" and terms him "a very noble youth," though he was in truth but a base dissembler, who was even then conspiring with the prince of hypocrites for Hamlet's immediate assassination. His affection for Ophelia was pure and noble. Enamored of her innocence, simplicity, and sweetness, he loved her ardently, even though his exalted rank seemed to bar their union. Strong as was that love, he sacrificed it upon the altar of his sworn resolve with greatest pain and only when, after testing her, he found her too weak in character to share his secret, and to become a partner in his project of "revenge." We might never realize the depth of that love, had not Laertes' turgid show of grief aroused the dormant passion of a man who "loved her more than forty thousand brothers."

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His affection for his mother surpassed that filial love which is common to every son. Never suspecting anything unworthy, he had from the habit of idealizing made her better and more worthy than she was; and accordingly, in sensitive refinement, he had also intensified his love to like magnitude. Hence, on discovering the fickleness and unworthiness of his fond idol, there arose a grief in proportion with his love. Though her disgraceful conduct shamed and dishonored him; though it shook his whole moral nature, and struck a vital blow at his heart, and shattered his ideal love; she was still his mother, and he continued to respect, to honor, and to love her, as he might, according to the divine command. It was this strong and surviving affection for his erring mother, that inspired his noble effort to lead her back to virtue; and this effort is disclosed in a grand moral invective of the highest power, wherein he holds the mirror of her sin, and shame, and disgrace before her eyes, and urges her to repentance and confession.

But the Prince's affectionate nature is, above all, manifested in reverence for his father. It was a reverence born of an idolizing love, whose vehemence is again and again forced upon us. If a person's grief at the loss of some dear one, is equal to the love which was felt for that individual, then Hamlet's intense sorrow is a proof of a filial love unsurpassed in warmth and sincerity of feeling. His was a child-like love, noble in its genuine simplicity, and replete with unreasoning filial piety and devotion. From his mother, who had proved traitorous to his fond dream, he turned in satisfaction to his noble father, in whom at least he saw verified his high ideals. With profoundest affection he could truly say of him:

“He was a man, take him for all in all
I shall not look upon his like again.”

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In unbounded love and reverence, he as wont to meditate upon his grand character, noble bearing, virtues, and achievements, until he seemed actually to perceive in him "the grace of Apollo," "the front of Jove," and "the eye of Mars." This vehemence of his love allowed him to see naught in his kingly sire, save

"A combination and a form indeed,
Where every god did seem to set his seal
To give the world assurance of a man."

Preëminence in intellectual gifts and culture raises Hamlet above the common plane of those about him. If his contemplative mind possesses deep inner experience, his well balanced powers give him ease of observation. His is a versatility of intellect which is marked by quickness of perception and rapid change of mental attitude. It is exhibited in philosophical abstractions, in keen reflections regarding men and matters, in bantering jests and wilting satire, and in readiness to divine the thoughts, and fathom the motives of all who seek to pierce his guise. With wondrous facility, he is equally at home in impersonating the madman, and in his own natural character.

The most striking trait of Hamlet is his exquisite moral sensibility. It is the master chord in the symphony of his character. His delicate conscience vibrates in harmony at the touch of virtue, and in discord at that of evil. To his ethically refined soul, vice seems naught but a hideous moral cancer, preying upon the human form. A strong sense of morality, based on a practical belief of Christian principles, enables him with intuitive glance to sweep the moral heavens, and to read therein the natural or divine law in its relation to human life and action, and to comprehend the hostility intrinsic to repellent forces of good and evil. It is this keen moral sense, ever manifest in his love for the good, the beautiful, and the

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true, that ennobles and embellishes a character which, already strongly marked by agreeable qualities, wins universal love and admiration.

In illustration of the delicacy of the Prince's moral character, we may recall the apt and beautiful comparison of Dr. Onimus in *La Psychologie de Shakespeare*. There are children who are born musicians, whom a single false note irritates. No discordant note can escape them, and they cannot comprehend how others differently organized, should be devoid of sense of harmony. Others again are born with an exquisite sense of color and form, and anything at variance with their artistic temperament wounds and repels them. Hamlet is one of these artistic natures. He is an artist of the moral sense. Born with a feeling the most delicate for everything that is virtuous and noble, he is enamored of truth and virtue, just as the musician is of harmony, and the sculptor and painter of ideal form. Hence vices and weaknesses which mar our human nature, shock him as hideous monstrosities. This is manifest in the loathing he endures, when in contact with flatterers and hypocrites, as well as in his inclination to expose and humiliate them. The reprobate is his natural enemy; and his heart's revolt in their presence is similar to the shrinking feeling of disgust, which Marguerite feels in the presence of Mephistopheles. On the other hand, with what pleasure does he grasp the frank and loyal hand of Horatio! The very presence of a true and honest man soothes his heart, and makes humanity seem less hateful.

Such honest, noble men were few about him, and in the new situation, he felt his isolation keenly. Surprising, therefore, and painful was the transformed scene, which met his gaze on return from the "school at Wittenberg." If a sense of honor and of Christian virtue had maintained decorum at his father's court, life at Elsinore was now disgraced by an uproarious crew of bacchanalian satyrs. As the fratricidal King,

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so were the courtiers, parasites, strong in eye and lip service, and shallow in mental and moral culture. Hamlet was, therefore, right in despising a courtly life, where a smiling murderous villain and an incestuous queen were the sad measure of morality. Since such a life, so abhorrent to his noble nature, was in contradiction to his high ideals and aspirations, as well as repulsive to his refined moral feelings, he would live and move at court, like a denizen of another world, who understood nothing of their language and their customs. Impelled by a moral courage, as superior to the physical as it is more noble, he would dare set himself above an evil court, and measure everyone by the true standard of Christian honor and principles of morality. The commission entrusted to him by the purgatorial visitor might be considered divine, and in its fulfilment, he would first direct all his energies to bring back to virtue a fickle Queen, and then, even at the cost of life, depose and punish a murderous usurper. Thus would he vindicate law and justice, and restore peace to the disturbed social and moral order. In the accomplishment of all this, he resolved to keep his eye ever fixed on the guiding polar star of Christian faith, in order to preserve himself untainted from contact with evil; and to the very last, through heart-sickness and mental torture, he adhered unswervingly to duty and to the love of good and abhorrence of evil.

He wins our sympathy from his very first appearance, and it deepens as, Act by Act, he unfolds the grandeur of his noble character. Moving all alone amid sycophants of a hostile court, with no friend or counselor save Horatio, he dares reveal his gloomy thoughts and feelings only in soliloquy, or under the mask of madness. When we see him engulfed in gloom, or glowing in the height of passion, or struggling with shifting shoals and currents; when we hear him uttering in philosophic mood words of practical wisdom or moral reflections on human life; when we view him in playful

badinage and intermittent brilliant plays of irony and wit, in which all contestants appear as puppets in his hands; we watch in charm and admiration his perfect portrayal of the madman, and listen with fellow-feeling and wrapt interest to the revelation of the secrets of his heart. Turbulent impulses, often at war with conscience, impel him to sweep with ruthless hand the gamut of human passions, and we hear the chords vibrate, now with love or hatred, now with hope or despair. As in heart frozen with terror or softened to pity, he fluctuates between wonder and awe, between anguish and mental exaltation; as in mind keenly edged by preternatural visitings, he walks with the sole light of Christian principles, amid the deep shadows of an unexplored mysterious realm, we accompany him in religious reverence and apprehension on the border-land of another world. In some manner we feel identified with him throughout. His emotions and thoughts are our own. Forgetful of self, we become absorbed in his personality, as we see humanity in turn absorbed in him. In him, as in a mirror, each generation in the flight of time, has seen itself reflected, for the stage of action in this drama is the world of every age, and its hero, involved now in gloom and now in sunshine, and the varying moods of doubt and suffering, represents mankind. He is a grand philosopher of thought, whose pathetic figure, rare gifts of genius, refined Christian morals, nobleness of character and personal charm, have led the many to recognize in him the protagonist in our drama of human life.

Part Second

A NEW COMMENTARY

on

THE TRAGEDY *of* HAMLET

PRINCE OF DENMARK

ACT FIRST

SCENE FIRST

WEIRD EXPECTANCY

At the very opening of the drama, the Poet strikes the note which shall dominate the Play throughout. His usual practice, as seen in many of his dramas, is to foreshadow the action from the very start, and to acquaint his auditors with the situation of affairs. *The Tragedy of Macbeth* opens with a weird scene in a bleak desert, where evil spirits in human form premeditate an attack upon the soul of the leading character. The first scene in *Richard III.* reveals not only the course of the tragedy, but also sketches in brief the base qualities and villainous designs of the man who is to guide its action. But in no other drama has Shakespeare equalled in poetic grandeur the opening scene of *Hamlet*. In dreary watch beneath a wintry sky of twinkling stars, the lone sentinel, benumbed by the biting air of January, paces to and fro in the dead of night along the dark parapets of the castle of Elsinore. A sense of dread mystery and a fear of the reappearance of the ghost, blight his spirits and oppress him with heart-sickness and a melancholy loneliness. He pauses now and then in anxious restlessness, either to listen to the dismal voice of the sea as it roars against the rocky cliff below, or to count the solemn strokes of the weird midnight bell, or again in eagerness to catch the first footfall of the sentinel whom he expects to relieve him at any moment. The solemn scene and the gloomy thoughts and feelings of the sentinels aptly prepare the audience for the entrance of the preternatural visitor.

Because of its unusual and mystifying nature, the preternatural always has a strong attraction for the multitude. Its influence was strong in the Poet's day, when the masses still adhered to the Christian doctrine of the supernatural. In modern times, however, the spirit of Materialism and Rationalism, arising from the dissolving faith of the Christian sects, has rejected, to a great extent, the supernatural for the natural. Nevertheless, even Rationalists and Positivists will, we shall see, find it difficult to resist the powerful appeal for faith in the preternatural, which Shakespeare makes throughout the First Act of the tragedy.

The scene opens with a voice ringing out through the silent darkness of the night. It is the challenge of Bernardo. He feared lest the obscure form of the approaching sentinel were the ghost which he had seen on the previous night. The guard in turn startled and seized with fear, challenges Bernardo to stand and give the watch-word. Their conversation naturally turns upon the apparition, and Bernardo, fearing to meet the ghost in his solitary beat, urges the departing Francisco to hasten the arrival of Marcellus and Horatio.

As the ghost is the prime element on which the tragedy depends, the Poet insists on bringing out its objective reality. He, therefore, labors to present to our senses such evidence as will convince a sane mind that the apparition is not imaginary or subjective, but a true and actually objective ghost. Hence, two soldiers, sturdy, courageous, and little given to imagination or to dreaming, encounter it together. Both, while on duty as sentinels, see "the dreaded sight" on two successive nights. They narrate their experience to Horatio, but find him utterly incredulous. In consequence, they challenge him to join them that very night and to verify for himself the truth of their story. After the midnight hour when all three are on the watch together, Horatio still professes incredulity, and declines to credit their reiterated story. A scholar-

ly man, he is naturally skeptical concerning ghosts; he knows they prove too often but dreamy phantoms, which, even when evidently real, are explained away by natural causes. He knows, moreover, that persons of overwrought nerves or of an hysterical temperament are sometimes, when highly excited, affected in a manner inverse to the natural order; for the image, conjured up by their abnormally disturbed imagination, is so vividly pictured forth that they seem to see the object corresponding to that image in the same manner as if it really existed outside their fancy. Such was their ghost, thinks Horatio, an hallucination born of fear and darkness and the offspring of their super-excited imagination. He does not deny the possibility of the preternatural, but he will not, as becomes a prudent man, admit its reality until he has the undoubted evidence of his own senses. Against Horatio's scepticism, the sentinels stand firm, and attempt to convince him of his error. Bernardo now under the influence of the mysterious awe which surrounds the preternatural, assumes unconsciously an elevated and solemn style, as he tells his experience of the preceeding nights.

A STRANGE VISITOR

Bernardo had scarce begun his narration, when as the tower-bell tolled the hour of one, the ghost enters noiselessly as twice before in the form of the dead king, and clad in armor. All are startled at its presence, and in excitement arise, overcome by dread and fear. Impelled by the popular belief that a ghost may not speak till spoken to, Bernardo in awe urges Horatio in earnest words: "Thou art a scholar: speak to it, Horatio." It was commonly believed that a supernatural being could not be spoken to with effect save by persons of learning. It does not appear, however, why a man of learning should possess more power over a ghost or evil spirit than an unlearned man. If the reason which some assign be that Horatio as a scholar was presumably familiar

with the language of the Church, which is used in the exorcism of evil spirits, such a reason is ineffectual, and arises from a confusion of ideas. It is true that all the sacraments and rites of the Catholic ritual are, by ordination of the Church, performed in the Latin tongue; but it is evident that the Latin language, as such, does not confer any power over evil spirits; this power is inherent in the rite of exorcism, which can be performed solely by a minister who has received it from the Church through the sacrament of Holy Orders. Horatio, as a layman, did not possess this power, nor, as a Catholic, could he think of presuming to usurp it sacrilegiously, and, therefore, the mere use of the Latin tongue would give him no more influence over the ghost than would any other language. Of this, the officers, as Catholics, were well aware, and in consequence, we must suppose that they appealed to Horatio for other reasons.

Bernardo and Marcellus, overcome by feelings of awe and dread in presence of the preternatural, were too affrighted to speak to "the dreaded sight," and begged Horatio to do so. They, moreover, yielded in deference to his learning; for, as a cultured man, he should know better than they how to address the ghost in a fitting manner, and so perhaps induce him to deliver his message from the grave. But Horatio, more affrighted than the officers, who see the ghost for the third time, stood pallid, mute, and overawed. It was only natural that the wonder and terror which for a time unmanned him, should be proportioned to the levity with which from obstinate incredulity he had treated the testimony of Bernardo and Marcellus. Only after further urging does he summon courage to address the apparition. In befitting solemn tones, he conjures and commands it to speak in the name of heaven. His words vibrate through the stilly night, but bring no answer from the stately spectre, which as if offended, turns its back upon them, and silently stalks away. Horatio grows bolder as the phantom retires, and

follows a few paces. With commanding gesture, he charges it to tarry and to speak. All in vain; its message is for other ears.

The officers, who had witnessed the trembling of Horatio and the pallor of his face, now on recovering from their fright, taunt him in triumph with his former incredulity. Horatio in manly candor admits his error, confesses himself "harrowed with fear and wonder," and before God solemnly attests his inability to remain blind in presence of the overpowering sensible proof of his own eyes. This change of Horatio from a sceptic to a firm believer, is a point which the Poet labors to impress upon his audience. He clearly wishes the spectator, if sceptical, to be converted like Horatio into a firm believer in the reality of the ghost.

Free from fear, but still under the spell of the preternatural, all in highly excited feelings solemnly converse concerning the probable mission of the ghostly visitor. Marcellus, the most inquisitive, seeks the meaning of the unusual activity noted on every side. Why these nightly watches? Why the impressment of citizens to labor day and night? Why the hurried toil and bustle in shipyards and in arsenals? Horatio, whose intimacy with Hamlet gives him better opportunities for information, tells them of the whispered reports common through the court. In detail, he narrates how the elder Hamlet, whose ghost they had just now seen, had been challenged by the King of Norway to single combat, on the mutual wager that the vanquished was to yield his territory to the victor. Hamlet's father won the prize, and now at his death young Fortinbras, inspired by the hope of recovering the lost domain, is raising an army against the new King of Denmark. This threatened invasion is then the cause of "the post-haste and romage in the land."

To Horatio and the officers, who have not the least suspicion of the murder of Hamlet's father, the whispered report seems, not only a satisfactory explanation of the war-

like preparation, but also offers a probable reason for the visits of the ghost. On the supposition that the dead king "was and is the question of these wars," Bernardo sees a fittingness in his appearance on their nightly watch before the castle, clad as of old in the panoply of war. Horatio fears, however, and conjectures that the spirit of the warrior-king returns, a harbinger of evil, and the thought recalls the prodigies which in pagan Rome preceded the assassination of Julius Caesar. In the description of these omens, the Poet probably borrows from Lucan's *Pharsalia*. It mentions the eclipse, the comet, and flaming heavens, and ghosts walking the streets of Rome. There is also a marked allusion to Sacred Scripture in the reference to doomsday or the final day of general judgment. On that dread day, when the Son of Man shall come in glory to judge mankind, it is prophesied that "The sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven."¹ And again, in the *Apocalypse*,² "The sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the whole moon became as blood."

A GOOD SPIRIT

Horatio was suddenly interrupted in his speech by the entrance of the ghost. Its reappearance at the very moment that he was speaking of some probable disaster to the State, lends force to his conjectures. Though not now affected by the same overpowering fear, which seized him at the spectre's first appearance, his broken words uttered in bated breath show his intense excitement. Staring in awe at the dread-inspiring spectre, he exclaims:

But soft, behold! lo, where it comes again!
I'll cross it, though it blast me. Stay, illusion!
If thou hast any sound, or use of voice, (It spreads its arms)
Speak to me.

¹ "St. Matth." XXIV 29.

² "Apoc." VI. 12.

The words, "*I'll cross it*," have been strangely misinterpreted by commentators who are unacquainted with Catholic practices. They imagine the Horatio of the stage to utter the words while walking across the path of the ghost. This action they justify on the supposition that a person crossing the path of a spectre subjects himself to its malign influence. Such a supposition is, however, without foundation, and seems invoked simply to explain the supposed action of Horatio. There is nothing to show that such a senseless act could affect Horatio, and stay the progress of an immaterial and intangible ghost. The text offers no difficulty to any one who like Shakespeare is familiar with Catholic practices. Of all modern tragedians, Fechter alone followed the rational interpretation. His Horatio instead of striding across the path of the spectre, suits his action to his words, and actually *crosses it*, that is makes the sign of the cross before it, and instantly, as Shakespeare intended, the ghost stops, as every purgatorial ghost should.

To cross has various meanings, one of which according to standard authorities, is, "to make the sign of the cross." "To cross it" and "to cross oneself" are common expressions which to every Catholic can mean nothing else than to make the sign of the cross upon a thing or upon oneself. In this sense Horatio crossed the ghost, and that such was the Poet's intention is clear from a parallel instance in *the Comedy of Errors*. Dromio, when overcome by fear, exclaims:

"O, for my beads! *I cross me* for a sinner,
This is the fairy land; O, spite of spites!
We talk with goblins, owls, and elvish sprites!
If we obey them not, this will ensue,
They'll suck our breath, or pinch us black and blue. (II. 2.)

Horatio and Dromio are both affrighted; the one at a ghost, and the other at goblins and sprites. Both use the same word *cross*, the one crossing himself and the other the ghost as a protection against evil.

To an unthinking mind, Horatio's act might seem superstitious. There are indeed many superstitions current among the un-Christian masses, which irrationally attribute a preternatural efficacy to some talisman or charm; but such is not the Christian's faith in the sign of the cross; his confidence is based on a real potency derived from the Son of God. By the cross He conquered sin and Satan, and in consequence, it has become in the Christian world the honored sign of salvation, and like a monarch's sceptre, the universally recognized symbol of the Savior's divine power. Hence the Church prescribes its use in all her sacraments and ceremonies, as well as for the exorcism of evil spirits. Catholics are accustomed to cross themselves, not only in their devotions, but also in temptation and peril; and if suddenly affrighted, as was Horatio, they like him invoke the Savior's power by crossing themselves or the object that excites their fear.

The action of the tragedy occurs in the early part of the eleventh century, and all the characters exhibit themselves as either bad, or indifferent, or good Catholics. Of the latter kind are Hamlet and Horatio. Both terrified in presence of the same ghost invoke the aid of heaven, the one exclaiming, "Angels and ministers of grace defend us," the other, relying upon the supernatural power of the cross, feels no fear, even though the ghost should attempt to blast him. He knows that the cross is a sacred sign loved by angels and hated by demons, who tremble and flee before it. If the ghost be a good spirit, it will respect the symbol; if it be evil, it will quickly vanish. His Christian confidence is rewarded; the ghost neither vanishes nor manifests disturbance, but standing still, expresses its recognition of the sign of Horatio by extending its arms in the form of a cross. Such is Shakespeare's direction as noted in his own acting copy of 1604, which is commonly known as the Second Quarto.

A TRIPLE APPEAL

Horatio instantly concludes that it is a good spirit, and feels encouraged to address it further with the hope of discovering the purpose for which it "revisits the glimpses of the moon." His words prompted by Christian faith embrace a threefold question. The first, which concerns the condition of the disembodied spirit, can have reference neither to a soul in bliss nor to one in perdition; the former is beyond all suffering, and the latter can have no easement. His question, therefore, can only relate to a soul in the state of unrest or purgation. His words are, however, unintelligible to a reader that is not illumined by Christian faith. They presuppose: first, that the spiritual kingdom of the Son of God comprehends all the faithful united with Him in heaven, and on earth, and in the spirit world of purgation; second, that the just on earth, can by virtue of inter-communion succor the souls of those faithful departed who are still undergoing purification; and third, that these souls no longer capable of meriting for themselves, earnestly desire their friends on earth to shorten the term of their imprisonment by vicarious good works: these Christian truths are necessarily implied in the question which Horatio addresses to the ghost. Knowing Hamlet's father well in life, he is sure that the spectre before him is in his exact form, features, and attire. He is also aware of the circumstance of which the ghost himself later on bitterly complains: that he was cut off without the salutary sacraments of the dying, and ushered into eternity "with all his imperfections on his head." This fact together with his strange haunting visits, seem to Horatio sufficient reasons for supposing him to be a purgatorial spirit. Hence, inspired by this Christian faith he feels a sincere commiseration for the poor ghost, and seeks anxiously to learn if he can do any good work to ease his sufferings:

“Speak to me:

If there be any good thing to be done,
That may to thee do ease and grace to me,
Speak to me.”

Horatio's failure by earnest pleading to induce the ghost to reveal the secret purpose of his mission, leaves him surprised and overawed at the solemn, chilling stare of the silent spectre. He proceeds, nevertheless, with hope and undaunted courage to address it again. His second question arises from a strange coincidence: the dead king had reappeared in the accoutrements of battle at the very time when Horatio and the sentinels were conversing on the cause of the impending war. The entrance of the ghost thus attired and at such a moment naturally suggested the thought that perhaps he had some preternatural information regarding Denmark's fate. On this supposition, Horatio appeals to the former patriotism of the late monarch, and urges him to disclose his prophetic knowledge for the welfare of his country:

“Speak to me:

If thou art privy to thy country's fate,
Which happily foreknowing may avoid,
O, speak!”

Again, when the solemn, silent ghost gives no response by word or sign, Horatio attempts a third time to discover the secret of his visitings. If it be, as it seems, a purgatorial ghost, its presence may be due to the desire of having some act of justice done, which it neglected to perform in its life on earth. Horatio is aware of the popular belief that the soul of a man who dies in possession of ill-gotten treasure, which he has concealed in secret places, can find no rest until he has made restitution. Souls in such cases are known to have returned to earth in the interests of justice. That perhaps is what troubles the ghost before him. Cut off by sudden death, the late king had no opportunity of carrying out his good intention of righting wrongs he may have committed. Ho-

ratio on this probable supposition feelingly appeals to the spectre with the promise of performing anything it may desire in the cause of justice :

“Or if thou hast uphoarded in thy life
Extorted treasure in the womb of earth,
For which, they say, you spirits oft walk in death, (the
cock crows)
Speak of it; stay, and speak!”

Futile were the appeals of Horatio. The sight of the kingly ghost turning his back in silence as if offended, and solemnly walking away, rouses Horatio and the officers to such a degree of excitement that, all forgetful of the spiritual nature of the ghost, they wildly strike at him, and attempt to stay him by violence. When, however, the spectre had vanished, they regain their senses, and Marcellus, impressed by the ghost's majestic bearing, is the first to express regret at their folly: no material weapon can touch a ghost, since it is by nature intangible and invulnerable.

THE HALLOWED SEASON

Their fears are allayed with the disappearance of the ghost; but the intense excitement, which was aroused by the presence of the preternatural, is now succeeded by a high exaltation of mind. It leads them to picture their thoughts and sentiments of the supernatural in fine poetic phrases. Bernardo's statement that the spectre was about to speak when the cock crowed, is confirmed by Horatio, who in proof of it invokes a common belief that all spirits wandering over earth and sea hasten to their confines at the crowing of the cock at dawn of day. This popular belief, Horatio holds to be approved as true by what they themselves have now seen.

“No Addison,” says Coleridge, “could be more careful to be poetical in diction than Shakespeare when elevating a thing almost mean by familiarity.” In the pagan world, the cock, as the herald of the morn, was dedicated to the sun-

god, Apollo. His crowing was to the Roman a presage of victory. The Fathers of the early and medieval Church homilized on his chanting, and clothed him with a symbolism, whose artistic expression is found in the catacombs and in mural paintings, as well as in the weather-vanes of ancient spires and belfries. The Christian poets of the same period made him emblematic and prophetic, and sang his praises in verses that blend the mystical and the literal.

The words of Horatio are but the reflex of thoughts found in the verses of Prudentius (348-405), whom Bentley calls the Christian Horace. Behind the obvious literary sense of his poem, *Ad Galli Cantum*, the Christian, whose mind is saturated with symbolic lore, readily surmises the mystical, and associates the cock-crow with the approach of "light, safety, and divinity." The night is sin, the day is grace, and Christ is the Light of day, which invades the realms of the spirits of darkness:

"Invisa nam vicinitas
Lucis, salutis, numinis
Rupto tenebrarum situ,
Noctis fugat satellites."

"Ferunt Vagantes daemones,
Laetos tenebris noctium,
Gallo canente exterritos
Sparsim timere et cedere."³

St. Ambrose (340-397), the father of Latin Hymnody, like Prudentius, expresses the same thought as Horatio and under a similar figure. In his poem, *Aeterne Rerum Condi-*

³ For the near coming, though unseen,
Of light, salvation, Deity,
Dispels the darkness that hath been
And makes its hideous minions flee.

Thay say the roving demon-flock
That joyful sports in shades of night,
Starts at the crowing of the cock
And scatters far in sudden fright.

tor, the winged messenger of day struts in more stately guise, as the herald whose "lofty shrill-sounding voice" summons the Light into the lists to dispute with the Black Prince in warlike debate:

"*Praeco diei jam sonat,
Noctis profundae pervigil;
Nocturna lux viantibus,
A nocte noctem segregans.*"

"*Hoc excitatus Lucifer
Solvit polum caligine;
Hoc omnis errorum cohors
Viam nocendi deserit.*"⁴

Again in a mystical sense, the clarion call of chanticleer announces the Light of the world, who brings hope and spiritual strength, turns aside the sword of Satan, and renews confidence of pardon in the sinner:

"*Gallo canente spes redit,
Aegris salus refunditur,
Mucro latronis conditur,
Lapsis fides revertitur.*"⁵

They were now near the close of Christmas-tide and the words of Horatio suggested to Marcellus another belief current among Christian folk. "Some say," he affirms, that at

⁴ Behold! the Herald of the Day —
Who as a lamp when light is gone,
Doth watches of the night display —
Now wakes the splendors of the dawn.

And as he sings, the morning star
Dissolves the darkness of the sky:
The motley crews of night afar
From wonted paths of evil fly.

⁵ The clarion call of chanticleer
Unto the sick brings health again;
The robber's sword is sheathed in fear;
And trust returns to fallen man.

Vid. "American Eccles. Review", Vol. XV, "Aeterne Rerum Conditor", by H. T. Henry.

the season of the Savior's birth,⁶ when "the bird of dawning singeth" the changing watches of the night, evil spirits are curtailed in their powers, and may not enter our upper air, nor seek in witches' forms to harm any mortal of the human race. The reason, he assigns, is characteristically Christian: the season is so holy and so full of divine grace. The belief, no doubt, arose from the fact that, when our Savior was born at midnight about the time of the first cock-crow, angels sung the first Christmas carol to the Shepherds on the hills of Bethlehem. As a Christian, Marcellus would naturally believe that, when the Heavenly Host descended to sing the birth of the Light of the world, the spirits of evil and of darkness would fly away in terror and dismay.

Horatio in reply professes to accept the popular belief with certain limitations. Of him a German critic⁷ writes: "Horatio believes the traditions of Christian superstitions only in part, and according to his tone, not at all." This last thought is unwarranted by the text, as well as by "its tone," which is clearly not Shakespeare's but rather the critic's own. Gervinus, as a Rationalist was necessarily hostile to Christianity, as he knew it in its Protestant form, and rejecting it for Rationalism, he also rejected the real Christianity of the ages, of which he had not even an elementary knowledge. His dogmatic and irreligious tenets had, moreover, so dimmed his mental vision as to make all things Christian appear as a mass of superstition. Hence, unable, in the present instance, to comprehend the Christian sentiments of Horatio and Marcellus, he fails to distinguish between the real and mystical sense, as well as between folk-lore and Christian

⁶ "The holiness of Advent is such as to cause cocks to crow all night long." (Trench's Commentary, p. 47). These words, which are not in accord with the text, clearly arise from a confusion of ideas. Advent like Lent is, not a joyous, but a penitential season in preparation for the great festival of Christmas. It closes when on the eve of Dec. 25th, the holy season, known, as Christmas-tide, begins, and of this season Marcellus speaks.

⁷ Gervinus: "Shakespeare's Commentaries", p. 562.

tradition. The latter is not necessarily one with the former. A popular belief is identified with Christian tradition only when it is a truth which the Church teaches as a matter of Catholic Faith. A man like Horatio was, therefore, free to accept or to reject in part the words of Marcellus without being thereby less of a Christian.

A Rationalist, while grasping the literary sense of the text, is naturally blind to its mystical meaning. To him there is no Savior born; to him angelic hosts bring no heavenly greetings; to him the birth-day of the Lord is neither "hallowed nor full of grace." It is, however, otherwise with Christians: to them, because of "good will," angels bring "glad tidings;" to them is born a Savior; to them comes "the Light of the world," who shall shatter by His power divine the Satanic realm of darkness, and restore to all of good will their lost liberty and inheritance. It is then in this mystical sense that the Christian scholar accepts the words of Marcellus.

The scene closes as the dawn of day is fast approaching. Horatio exhorts his companions to go with him to "young Hamlet;" it is their duty to inform him of the strange event. His father's ghost, so dumb to them, will surely speak to him. Thus the audience roused to great expectations, is eager for the entrance of the chief character, who alone can unseal the lips of the mysterious visitor.

SCENE SECOND

A PUBLIC AUDIENCE

At the close of the first scene the spectator, left in highly excited mood and aroused to curiosity concerning the secret of the ghostly visitor, is given relief in the second. This not only introduces him to the chief characters, but also prepares him for a perfect understanding of the near preternatural revelations. The King and Queen, enthroned in full state with numerous attendants, hold the first public reception since their recent marriage. Though we are introduced to Claudius, the brother of Hamlet's father, and to the Queen, who a few weeks after her husband's death had married her brother-in-law, we are, like the citizens of Denmark, left in ignorance of Gertrude's guilt, and of the King's crimes of seduction and murder. Foremost among the attendants is Polonius, the old prime-minister of state. In fear of Hamlet's lasting aversion, he had adroitly turned to his own interest the threatened war of Norway by a successful intrigue to set aside the rights of the crown prince in favor of an uncle, whom he deemed more subject to his diplomatic skill. There is also the young courtier, Laertes, a superficial character as opposite to Hamlet, as pole is to pole. Present in public court, but clad in mourning, and holding aloof in sullen silence from the festive throng, is seen for the first time the hero of the tragedy. The spectator is to see his grand character portrayed in the progress of the drama, as in a scroll unrolled before his eyes.

At this public reception Claudius bears himself with royal dignity, and in his speech discloses prudence, diplomacy, and consciousness of responsibility. The speech com-

prises two distinct parts. The first, formal and artificial, is couched in highly colored and affected language, which clearly reveals the secret strain under which the murderer labors. His studied words and phrases, scarcely conceal his hypocrisy and the emptiness of his assumed grief. His public boast that a month after his dear brother's death, he yet keeps his memory green, is full of irony. He feels that his shameful haste in marrying the wife of his brother, while the whole state wore "one brow of woe," has not met with popular approval, hence, he pleads in excuse that discretion had urged him, notwithstanding his doleful feelings, to take his "sometime sister" for his queen. His hasty wedding, it is true, had given mirth to the funeral and a dirge to the marriage, but with tearful eyes he had entered upon it for the interests of the realm, and was impelled thereto by wise councillors of state, whose words of wisdom and prudence forbade him to resist. He closes the first part of his speech with thanks to all for their favor.

The second part presents a remarkable contrast both in language and in tone. Now free from restraint, he discourses on affairs of state naturally and with ease, and in a dignified, yet straightforward manner. The topic is his present relation with the Norwegian king. Young Fortinbras, supposing that the elder Hamlet's death had left Denmark in a disordered state, considered the moment opportune for demanding the restoration of the territory lost to his father. For the enforcement of the claim he was actually gathering an army of invasion. In consequence, Claudius informs the court that he is presently despatching two ambassadors to Norway to protest to the old king against the warlike preparation of his nephew.

On the departure of the embassy, the King graciously turns his attention to Laertes. His father as a willing tool

had been the prime mover in the plot which to the exclusion of Hamlet, had secured the crown for Claudius. In recognition of this service, the King in the presence of the father, protests his heart-felt beneficence for the son, and in proof thereof assures Laertes of his inability to refuse any favor he may ask. Another motive for the King's expression of gratitude, is perhaps the fact that considering his hold on the throne as yet uncertain, he desires to win the good will of the young courtier, who, as Hamlet's friend, might naturally prefer the Prince's succession to the crown.

Laertes on leaving Paris had as yet no information concerning the election of Claudius to the throne, and returned solely to attend the funeral of Hamlet's father. In the First Quarto he gives the King the true reason of his home-coming, but in the revised version, Shakespeare causes him to conceal it under a glib lie, uttered with the ease of a polished courtier. This was more in harmony with the character of the young noblemen, as drawn throughout the drama. The King, before granting the request of Laertes, turns in deference to Polonius, and learns that the son had by importunate and laborious petitions conquered the strong resistance of his indulgent old father. Parisian life had for Laertes an irresistible attraction. Frivolous of character and addicted to an empty life of pleasure and amusement, he found his sojourn in the gay capital had made the rude climate of his native land uncongenial, and the simple customs of his people utterly distasteful. Like many a poor patriot, he preferred expatriation.

MY COUSIN AND MY SON

With the affairs of state despatched, the King turns his attention to the Prince who has been standing aloof in deep despondency. His father's sudden death had called him

home from a calm life at the school at Wittenberg, where indulging his tastes as a scholar, he also skilled himself in bodily exercises, and attained eminence in all that befitted his age and condition. The gloom which clouds his mind, now agitated by painful images, is reflected in his melancholy mien and reproachful bearing towards the royal pair. His father's death he can bear with Christian resignation; but the ingratitude of his mother and her faithlessness to the fond memory of his father, so openly manifested by the base impropriety of rushing into a new alliance, and, what is more disgraceful still, into an unholy and incestuous marriage, rack his heart with grief and afflict his soul, which is keenly sensitive to moral beauty and turpitude.

The King had noticed Hamlet's gloomy looks and reproachful bearing, and seeks to rouse him from his melancholy. Though his secret crime prompts him to suspect that his nephew's sullen sadness arose from animosity towards himself, he concealed his suspicion, and addressed him affably in words of paternal affection; but the Prince, scarcely glancing at his uncle, interrupts him by the withering remark: "A little more than kin and less than kind." His words, presumably aside, show that he pierces the King's masked hypocrisy and mock tenderness. He is a "little more than kin," because of his double relation of nephew and son to Claudius; "and less than kind," because this new relation springs from an incestuous marriage, and is therefore unnatural and contrary to humankind. He is furthermore "too much in the sun" in the sunshine of his royal favor to be gloomy. "Being in the sun" was an old saying applied to a person ostracized from home, kindred, and social life. Hamlet perceived its application to himself; for after the loss of his father, the disgrace of his mother, and the circumvention of his rights to the crown, he felt that he was nothing

more than a shadow walking amid the court, where instead of being enveloped in the "clouds" of sorrow over the loss of his fondly loved father, he was in the midst of nuptial festivities and carousings.

The King, nonplussed by Hamlet's sarcastic words, yields to the Queen. She in turn exhorts her son to banish his sullen mood, and to show friendship for the King: and thus with little prudence and refinement of feeling she betrays the suspicion which Claudius had so artfully concealed. She next pleads with him to cease mourning for his father. To die is after all a fixed common law by which all mortals must pass through the gates of death from time to eternity.

"One writes, that 'other friends remain,'
That 'loss is common to the race'—
And common is the common-place,
And vacant chaff well meant for grain.

"That loss is common would not make
My own less bitter, rather more:
Too common! Never morning wore
To evening but some heart did break."

(Tennyson, In Mem. VI.)

True, "all that live must die," yet death is not the less afflicting. If it is common for all to die, it is also common for those nearest the departed loved one to mourn his loss. But the Queen by her argument implied that she felt the loss of her former husband no more than that of other mortals, and therefore, by her uncommon and unnatural feeling, and still more by her shameless avowal of it, she so shocked and wounded her son's sensitive soul, as to extort a reply, which with flashing scorn, shattered her platitudes. Her words, however, had deeply wounded her son; for they forced upon him the unwelcome truth, that within a month she had really

ceased to mourn his father, and would even banish his own fond memory of him, and blast the love that glowed in his filial heart.

The Queen's unfortunate use of the term "seems" shows, what the Poet more than once reveals, that the mother does not understand the character and disposition of her son. The notion that his mourning is mere seeming and conventional is galling to the truth-loving Hamlet, and merits the tart and passionate rebuke. "Seems, Madam! nay, it is; I know not seems." In a graphic picture he portrays the empty conventionalities of mourning in their varied forms and actions, such as a man might play, when clothed in the "trappings and the suits of woe!" In fine, dexterously insinuating that the mourning of Gertrude and Claudius is only a pretense, a poorly masked mockery, he passionately affirms that his overpowering grief, far from seeming, is beyond all external show and expression.

The Prince's reproachful words were wormwood to the Queen; but their force, after a painful silence, is parried by the King. Quick to recognize his consort's lack of prudence and tact, he in cunning admits no other cause of his nephew's gloom than his father's loss, and with a better knowledge of his character directly appeals to his strongly religious feelings. Hence we see him, an adept in duplicity, beginning by artfully approving Hamlet's mourning as "sweet and commendable," and then proceeding to repeat and enlarge upon the argument already given by the mother. In a long pedantic speech, he sanctimoniously preaches his nephew a lesson on resignation to the will of God: Hamlet's "obsequious sorrow" is an impious stubbornness, a fault against heaven, against nature, and even against the dead. This pious preachment must have seemed another instance of Satan quoting Scripture; for Hamlet felt that his sorrow for his

father so lately deceased, was not incompatible with resignation to the will of Divine Providence; but rather in conformity with it, since it resulted from the love which the Creator Himself implants in the heart of every son.

Such a man as Claudius, however, could not comprehend the varied causes which heightened Hamlets' grief; hence supposing his sullenness, aloofness, and offensive bearing to arise from his disappointment in the crown, he addresses him in flattering terms in public court; proclaims him his immediate successor; calls him his son, and assures him of the love of a dearest father for a dearest son. These flattering words must have been galling to the morally sensitive Prince, who, from long acquaintance with his uncle, loathed him as a man utterly depraved, and steeped in falsehood and hypocrisy. Hamlet cannot well give voice to his scornful feelings, but with a surprising self-command, he expresses his disdain for the proffered loving fatherhood thus pressed upon him, by ignoring, in rebukeful silence, the offensive words of the king.

Claudius, misjudging the cause of Hamlet's silence, imagines that he has gained him over, and concludes his speech by earnestly wishing him not to return to Wittenberg. His desire is probably prompted by the feeling that he could not trust Hamlet out of sight. The curse of crime which ever pursues the criminal, was already at work in Claudius, and engendered suspicion against the son of the murdered king; and this suspicion was strengthened by Hamlet's strange behavior. In consequence, the King considered it imperative to detain him in the realm. If Hamlet suspects the murder of his father, and plots to avenge it, he will more readily betray it to the watchful eyes of royal spies at home; if, on the other hand, his grief is only natural, his mind must be distracted. Amid the bustle and busy life at court, he will have little

opportunity to ponder and suspect. The King, accordingly, veiling his hypocrisy beneath honeyed words of kindness, pleads with him to remain at court, and be his cheer and comfort, his first courtier and his son. From this moment, begins the struggle between the uncle and the nephew; the one seeking to discover whether Hamlet has knowledge of the crime; the other to unravel the secret of his father's mysterious death. When Hamlet in his usual sullen silence ignores the King's flattering invitation, the Queen in turn pleads with him to stay. In answer to her prayer, he consents; for in his present mental grief and unrest, he feels indisposed to pursue his former course of studies, and again, deems it his duty to remain on the scene of action, in order to watch developments in the confirmation of his foul suspicions. His resolve brings manifest joy to Claudius and to Gertrude; and the former, relieved of uneasiness of mind, is prompted by habitual intemperance to make it the occasion of new carousals, which, according to his orders, are to be celebrated with roar of cannon.

FRAILTY, THY NAME IS WOMAN

Hamlet now alone, and more than ever irritated, reflects in impassioned mood upon the situation. His wondrous soliloquy in its vehemence of feeling speaks the supreme tension of his mind. In his mental agony, he seems the incarnation of a lost soul struggling in impenetrable gloom. His high ideals of life and grand moral character make him most sensitive to the evils which now blast his being, and change his life of happiness into misery and woe. Unaffected, hitherto, by the vain and fleeting interests of a humdrum world of bustle and of strife, he had created in the peaceful halls of study, another world of fancy, all his own, where were realized his high ideals of moral worth and goodness; where men

were noble, refined, and generous; where justice was recognized and honored both by sovereign and by subjects; and where honor and fidelity were the ornaments of domestic life. Happy in this ideal world, he had fashioned mankind in the mould of a virtuous and renowned father, whom he idolized, and womankind in that of a beautiful mother, whom he loved with ardent admiration. Rude, therefore, and terrible was the awakening shock which, shattering his utopian world, brought him face to face with the real world of lust, and strife, and ambition, and revealed to him all the vileness of humanity.

In the midst of deep gloom, suspicions haunt his mind, and presentiments of evil oppress his heart. Though he has no positive knowledge of foul play, yet distressing images float before his mind. There is his father's sudden death, so strange and mysterious; there is the known evil character of his uncle and his hypocritical grief; and there is the insensibility of Gertrude to her husband's loss, and her hurried, shameful marriage to his father's brother: All these combine to suggest suspicions of treachery, and these suspicions conjure up dark visions of evil, which, though voiceless and undefined, flit before his prophetic soul in loathsome forms too horrible to voice. Goaded on by these suspicions, he deems his life at court a hell; and, without knowing how or why, everything about him appears contaminated, and the very atmosphere he breathes, seems poisoned by the foul breath of lust, and treachery, and crime. Launched alone upon a dark mysterious sea, he feels himself drifting, he knows not whither, his mind torn by conflicts, and his soul crushed in despair by an overpowering weight, which seems greater than he can bear. In torturing pangs of grief, and a loathsome tedium of a life no longer worth the living, he catches amid the dense

gloom but one ray of light, and in anguish of mind and heart, desires and even calls on death.

Hitherto unfamiliar with the common walks of life, and free from contact with moral evil, he had, in speculative turn of mind, been accustomed to idealize human nature, and contemplate its nobleness rather than its debasing elements. These precisely are now brought home to him most strongly in their hideous concrete form. Of his ideal, he had truly said: "What a piece of work is man! how noble in reason! how infinite in faculty! in form and moving how express and admirable! in action how like an angel! in apprehension how like a god! the beauty of the world! the paragon of animals!" Like many a philosopher, he had mistaken his philosophic dreams for truthful realities; and like them, when awakened to the strong sunlight of facts, he is painfully surprised to discover them to be but empty phantoms. Misfortune having brought him into contact with human nature as it is, the contemplation of its depravity as reflected in his uncle and his mother, shocks his refined moral sensibilities, and afflicts him with an overpowering grief of mind and heart.

Man is no longer "the beauty of the world," nor in "action like an angel." He realizes from observation that man's lower nature too often enslaves the higher; that blind and brutal passions of the animal nature war against the spiritual and divine-like soul, and drag it down to wallow in the sloughs of vice. Disgusted at the realities before him, and oppressed by melancholy and a heart-rending grief, he wishes that this too material and sordid body might "resolve itself into a dew," and leave the soul in the grandeur and nobility of its creation, free to pursue the higher life. O, that his immortal soul might sunder its rude bonds, and be free from this degrading earthly tene-

ment! If only his immaterial spirit could wing its flight from this chrysalis of clay, he might divest himself of the appalling tedium of an existence so gross and wearisome. "How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable" are "the uses of this world!" It is at this moment, when the conscious hopelessness of his situation, now aggravated by the deepest melancholy, clouds his reason, and makes him feel acutely the weariness of life, that the thought of self-destruction flits across his mind.

To wish for death, when immersed in a sea of suffering, is common to our nature, and the wish, if dependent upon the will of Divine Providence, is devoid of moral evil. But suicide, or self-slaughter is intrinsically evil, and can not be entertained and consented to without a grievous moral taint. With Hamlet, however, self-murder was only a fitting thought, because, strong in the supernatural, he had formed his character according to Christian principles, and schooled himself to command his naturally strong will, and, therefore, the pagan idea of self-destruction found no lodgment in his mind. To crush the thought, the memory of the law which the Creator has fixed against self-murder was all sufficient.

"The great King of kings
Hath in the tables of His law commanded
That thou shalt do no murder." (Rich. III. 1. 4.)

"Against self-slaughter
There is a prohibition so divine
That cravens my weak hand." (Cymb. III. 4.)

To every Christian mind, suicide is a disgraceful act, which is due to a want of courage or fortitude to bear the ills of life. It is an unmanly shirking of the duties and responsibilities of our temporary and probationary existence. It is a usurpation of God's supremacy over life and death, and a presumptuous entrance without summons into the spirit

world. Self-destruction can find no place, save with the irreligious and unregenerated, who living in the moral darkness of paganism, know neither God nor man's grand destiny with its future rewards and punishments. Hamlet's wish to die under his crushing grief was but natural and even moral, because it was a wish to be free from evil, but not by unlawful means. This is evident from the fact that with the thought of self-destruction came the notion that it is a crime against nature's God, and the thought aroused in his soul an instant revulsion, which revealed his strong Christian character. Supreme as was his suffering, he would consent to nothing against the divine law and supremacy of God.¹

His mind shrouded in gloomy grief, Hamlet turns from the thought of self-destruction to the outer world, and contemplates its miniature in the life at court, where the unmourned memory of his father is dishonored by festivities and carousals. His greatest grief, however, is the conduct of his mother. This thought deserves attention, because many commentators on this soliloquy, picture "the great deed" of revenge as the load which presses so heavily upon Hamlet's agonizing soul. Such a cause is not only inadequate, but is even unsupported by the text. In this scene, in which the Prince stands before us for the first time, merely vague and undefined suspicions flit before his mind. As yet he has no knowledge of the ghost's dreadful revelation, nor has he even heard of its appearance to his friends; hence "the great deed" cannot be the cause of his overpowering mental suffering.

¹ An American School edition of Hamlet in commenting on the words, "O, that the Everlasting had not fixed His canon against self-slaughter", informs the reader with surprising naïveté that "there is no such canon". The remark appears the result of crass ignorance of the divine law, a supposition scarcely to be entertained, or of a misunderstanding of the same law. The divine command, "Thou shalt not kill" — thou shalt not take human life — is a universal law without objective limitation, and therefore equally forbids the slaughter of oneself as well as of a fellow-being. The law was so understood from the beginning, and so Shakespeare's philosopher understood it, as is clear from his words in the text.

Shakespeare, leaves no doubt as to the real cause. After the fleeting thought of suicide, Hamlet, in all that follows in a long soliloquy, concentrates his thoughts upon a dual subject, the one, the hastiness of his mother's marriage and the other, its incestuous nature. The Poet assigns this marriage as the cause of the grief which drives his melancholy hero to the brink of despair.² His grief is made more acute, by reason of the refinement of his nature, of his high ideas of honor, and of his more than common love for virtue and hatred of vice; in consequence, his mother's disgrace, which he feels his own, is magnified in his eyes. In speculative mind he had fancied an ideal mother, all according to his own creation, and endowing her with every noble quality, had looked upon her as the paragon of every womanly virtue and perfection; and for this ideal mother he had intensified and refined his ardent filial love. When, therefore, her disgraceful conduct rudely awakens him from his fond dream, and forces upon him the surprising disparity between his ideal and its shocking reality, his whole nature, so sensitively moral and refined, is stirred to its very depths by a painful revulsion, which engenders a grief in proportion to his former purified and intensified affection.

His grief is deepened by various elements, the first of which is the turpitude which he discerns in his mother's choice of a man like Claudius. Weighed in the balance with his father, he is "a king of shreds and patches." As Hamlet's love for virtue was the measure of his hatred of vice, so the same moral principles which led him to admire the virtu-

² Professor Trench strangely affirms: "Hamlet is but little concerned about this grave issue (the incestuous marriage); re-marriage, and at an early date appearing to him so serious as to render it unnecessary to dwell upon the point that the marriage is within prohibited degrees". "Shakespeare's Hamlet, A New Commentary".—The assertion is refuted by the text wherein Hamlet expressly says: "married with 'my uncle, my father's brother' ", and in the fifth line following, he calls it an "incestuous" marriage.

ous character of his sire, also inspired him to despise a man so opposite as Claudius. In comparison, his father seemed an Apollo and Claudius a hybrid, a human satyr grossly moulded with low instincts and depraved tastes. Another element of Hamlet's grief is the fickleness of his mother, and from it he reasons to the frailty of womankind. He ponders how his light-minded mother once ardently loved his virtuous father, yet, within "a little month," not only foregoes all customary mourning, and feels no grief, but even shamelessly rushes into a new alliance with infatuate haste. Her ingratitude, which seems too gross even for "a beast that wants discourse of reason," adds another pang to his already aching heart. But the greatest element of his grief was the incestuous nature of the marriage. "This aspect of the matter," says Professor Bradley, "leaves *us* comparatively unaffected, but Shakespeare evidently means it to be of importance. The ghost speaks of it twice, and Hamlet thrice (once in his last furious words to the King)." This remark is certainly true of the adherents of many modern religions, who are included in the *us* of Professor Bradley. It recalls the fact that the sects, when cut off from the olden Church and left to shift for themselves, inevitably drifted from the old to novel religious doctrines. Hamlets' view was Shakespeare's as well as Christendom's for fifteen centuries, and remains to-day the view of three hundred million Catholics. The same was the view of the State Church of England until changed by a very recent act of Parliament. If the incestuous union brought disgrace upon his mother, it also filled him with a burning sense of shame. It exhibited an astounding moral callousness and a coarse sensuality that stifled the voice of conscience, and contemned the sacred laws of the Christian religion which she professed. As yet he knows nothing of her marital infidelity to his father, but he does know that one who is

false to her conscience, to religion, and to God, forfeits the confidence of her fellowmen; and he further feels assured that an irreligious woman is an unvirtuous woman; and if such be his mother, what is woman worth? In bewilderment, he is filled with horror and despair. Turning from his cherished, but shattered idol on the one hand to the painful reality on the other, he perceives in sorrow, that with the loss of love and respect for his own mother, he had also lost faith in humankind. That this incestuous marriage was ever on his mind and afflicted him most acutely, is manifest from his frequent allusion to it throughout the drama. In the interview with his mother, he is lashed to fury at the sense of her indifference to shameful guilt. He lacerates and quickens her hardened conscience, and with the view of restoring her good name, urges her to leave Claudius, and to "assume a virtue if she have it not." At the sound of approaching foot-steps, his habitual filial piety commands him to silence further expression of his grief, and he closes abruptly with the words:

"But break my heart, for I must hold my tongue."

A STRANGE DISCLOSURE

Horatio with the officers of the watch enters in haste to unburden his secret of the apparition, but the Prince, still preoccupied with the painful thoughts that afflict his heart, fails to recognize him, and to the salutation, "Hail to your lordship," replies with the common-place, "I am glad to see you well." The words, however, break the spell that holds his mind captive, and turning to Horatio he greets him with a hearty gladsome welcome. Upon his friend professing to be his "poor servant ever," he protests, and in his usual princely courtesy, affirms that he recognizes him no otherwise than

as a good friend. It is the first meeting since their return from Wittenberg; and, in surprise at his presence, Hamlet questions the reason of his school-fellow's home-coming. He himself had hastened away at the first news of his father's death; but his friend, it seems, followed only some weeks later to attend the public funeral, which would be held with the usual royal pomp. Horatio in delicacy of feeling fears to deepen his friend's evident gloom, and in evasion alleges his natural disposition to truancy as the cause of his return.

"I could not," says Hamlet "allow your enemy to say so, nor shall I, your friend, credit your confession." With greater insistence he queries for the third time, "What is your affair at Elsinore?"

"My lord," replies Horatio, "I came to see your father's funeral."

The admission draws from the Prince the words of railery: "To see my father's funeral? Nay, nay, good friend, do not mock me. You came, I think to attend my mother's wedding." His splendid eulogium upon his father:

"He was a man, take him for all in all,
I shall not look upon his like again."

offers Horatio a fitting opportunity to introduce the object of his visit. "My lord," he says, "I think I saw the King, your father yesternight."

Hamlet perplexed and in wonderment can but utter the impassioned words; "O, for God's love, Horatio, let me hear of it." With intense attention and excitement he listens to his friend's wondrous story. "Marcellus and Bernardo," narrates Horatio, "while on their watch at the dead of night, had seen an apparition in form like your father's, which armed cap-a-pie marched solemnly in slow and stately pace before them. Thrice he passed before their fear-surprised eyes

as close as the length of their staff, whilst they, almost melting away with fear, were struck dumb with affright. On the third night I kept the watch with these gentlemen, and observed the same ghostly sight. I knew your father well; and the apparition was as like him as are my two hands. Once he lifted up his head and seemed about to speak, but at that moment the cock, the shrill trumpet of the morn, announced the dawning of the day, and instantly the ghostly form vanished into air. We saw his face; he wore his vizor up. His eyes were fixed upon us, and his countenance very pale had the look of sorrow rather than of anger. His beard was grizzled or sable-silvered as in life. He stayed as long as one might slowly count a hundred."

"Would I had been there!" exclaims Hamlet, "I will watch to-night; perchance it will walk again." The thought that his father's troubled spirit walks abroad on the instant banishes his melancholy gloom and grief. Unlike Horatio and the sentinels he knows no fear. Vaguely divining the portentous meaning of his father's spirit in arms nightly visiting the watches of the tower, he quickly plans his course of action, and shows his strength of will in an unfaltering purpose to meet the ghost in person, and address it, though hell itself should blast him and bid him hold his peace. Enjoining upon his three friends strict silence concerning the dread sight, he promises to join them at midnight in their watch on the ramparts of Elsinore, and till then he bids them a gracious farewell.

Again alone, he dwells in agitated mind on his presentiments, which, once only vague suspicions, have now assumed the proportions of doubt that almost borders on certainty. "What does it mean? My father's spirit, tell me why the sepulcher hath opened his ponderous and marble jaws, to cast thee up again." With difficulty he stills his prophetic

soul in impatient eagerness, till the appointed midnight hour. Then he shall discover the truth, certain that since the Almighty set the curse of Cain upon the brow of every killer of his kind,

“Murder though it have no tongue, will speak
With most miraculous organ.”

SCENE THIRD

CALUMNIOUS STROKES

The third scene interrupts the action of the drama by a skillful episode, in which the Poet introduces us to several important characters. Through them we are made acquainted with Hamlet's relation to Ophelia, and, moreover, given another glimpse of life at court as reflected in the family of Polonius. The characters, all drawn on a vastly lower scale than Hamlet's, are superficial and commonplace. There is the minister of state, whose mental equipment makes him a politician rather than a statesman, and his son, a courtier and type of the gilded youth who frequented the royal court in the days of Shakespeare. Both appear incredulous, not only of Hamlet's purity and honor, but even mistrust Ophelia herself. Hence, they readily attaint his name and blast her love, and thus entangle themselves unto final ruin in the web of Hamlet's fate.

If the brotherly affection of Laertes, though natural and common, shows him at his best in the present scene, the Poet, under other and later circumstances, portrays the baseness of his character. The Laertes of the modern stage is not always the Laertes of the drama. In the tragedy, he seems a light-minded, frivolous youth, without noble principles and serious purposes. Such a man could not understand the nobility of Hamlet's character, so rich in highly intellectual and moral attainments; and, therefore, by an error not infrequent to humankind, he measures others by his own individual low standard. In his lecture to Ophelia, he insists that the Prince is trifling with her heart; that his love, but the first glow of the springtide of life, is not serious and will surely

die with his young years. But Ophelia, who has had ample means of knowing Hamlet better than her brother, judges differently, and, by an unwillingness to discuss the delicate subject, laconically implies her doubts of the correctness of his judgment.

The doubt expressed by Ophelia causes her brother to maintain his position in a lengthy speech, in which he dishonorably insinuates that if the Prince really do love her, it is with an ignoble, an illicit love, since he is not free to marry her. His will is not his own, but subject to the powers that rule; and, therefore, not until his words of love are sanctioned by the "voice of Denmark," must she listen to "his songs." Accordingly, he urges her on the plea of honor, to be wary: her "safety lies in fear." In the passions of youth are blind traitorous impulses which often revolt against reason and the power of self-restraint. While the words of Laertes seem commendable, both because they are prompted by affection for his sister, and because the prudence and fear which they urge, are needed safeguards for virtue; they are, nevertheless, reprehensible in as far as they express a rash judgment of Hamlet's character. It is true that, according to an unwritten law, the crown prince could not marry whom he would, nor espouse one beneath his princely station, without the consent of the governing power. But this custom was clearly ignored in Hamlet's case. His courtship of Ophelia, a lady-in-waiting on the Queen, was no secret at court. Gertrude, who had made her a special favorite, knew well the mutual relation of the young lovers, and not only encouraged it, but even, as she affirms, looked forward to its consummation in lawful marriage.

That Hamlet's love for Ophelia was sincere and honest, is known from the Poet's portrayal of his highly sensitive moral nature. Throughout the drama he appears habitually

enamored of honesty and virtue, and repelled by deceit, vice, and everything dishonorable. Ophelia was herself convinced that his love was sincere and honorable, as is shown by her words to her father; and Hamlet himself gives undoubted proofs on numerous occasions, and above all, when, in a later public view, he outbraves Laertes in his love for her.

In the consciousness of her own innocence and in ignorance of the evils of the world, Ophelia listened patiently to her brother's words of caution and of prudence. They seemed founded on his own experience, and while partly admiring their worldly wisdom, she felt some suspicion of their application to Laertes himself. Accordingly, after the general remark that she will make his counsel the guardian of her heart, she forthwith proceeds to lecture him in turn. She knew well her brother's weaknesses and instability of character. More than once she had listened with deep interest to the glowing tales of his gay life in the brilliant southern capital. She had drawn her own secret conclusions, and now under strong suspicion that his counsels and his cautions were more applicable to himself, she naively urges that, while pointing out to her "the steep and thorny way to heaven," he should himself be true to his own preachment, and not, "like a puffed and reckless libertine," all heedless of his own spiritual weal, "tread the broad primrose path of dalliance," "the primrose way to the everlasting bonfire." After listening with impatience to his sister's lecture, Laertes disregards her words, and uttering a curt reply, which displays a confidence that is born of self-sufficiency, he hastens to depart. At the same moment Polonius enters unexpectedly. The son deftly meets with a flattering lie his father's manifest surprise at his belated presence: he had tarried to take a second fond leave of his aged sire, and to beg a second blessing.

PATERNAL COUNSEL

At their second farewell, Polonius impresses upon his son certain precepts for guidance in his life at Paris. The aged chancellor, says Caldecott, seems too weak to be the author of these precepts; for they ill accord with the character and intellect imputed to him in the rest of the Play, wherein he appears to be what Hamlet calls him, “ a tedious old fool,” — “a foolish prating knave.” The same view is held by Warburton, who adds that Polonius was pedant enough to have met with these precepts in his reading, and fool enough to get them by heart, and retail them for his own. The moment he is at the end of his lesson, we are regaled with a style very different. This opinion seems verified by the first edition of the play in 1603, in which the lines of Polonius appear in quotation marks, as taken from some well known source; and this source is probably Euphues in his advice to Philautus. Euphues is the chief character in John Lilly’s *Euphues or the Anatomy of Wit* (1579), and *Euphues and his England* (1581). He is supposed to be an Athenian gentleman, distinguished for his elegance and wit; and, in his person, Lilly designed to exhibit the high-flown diction and excessive elegance of style as affected by the gallants of England in the reign of Elizabeth.

The borrowed counsels of the old courtier may seem at first sight the wise and prudent dictates of a Christian father, and in fact have been regarded by many as of a very high strain of morality; but if viewed in the bright light of analysis, they appear in their true and genuine colors, as nothing more than the height of worldly wisdom, based upon purely selfish motives. They speak, it is true, the highest morality of Polonius — the rule of being wisely selfish — the rule that “honesty is the best policy;” but no truly honest man, wisely remarks Hudson, ever acts on that principle. A man who

acts on no higher principle than that of being true to himself will fail, because to be true to himself, a man must make it a matter of conscience to be true to something higher than himself. Love of rectitude is the only thing that will serve. How low and futile appears the code of Polonius when compared with the noble, unselfish counsel given by another chancellor of Shakespeare:

“Love thyself last; cherish those hearts that hate thee;
Corruption wins not more than honesty.
. Be just and fear not;
Let all the ends thou aimst at, be thy country’s,
Thy God’s and truth’s.”

It has been observed that nothing shows more clearly the shallowness of Polonius, than his address to Laertes. He evinces no real parental feeling at the departure of his son, but is satisfied with the utterance of a sum of commonplace aphorisms, which might "serve for headlines for a copy book and be continued ad infinitum." There is no word of religion nor appeal to religious motives, which form the only firm base of true morality. There is nothing higher than thoughts of personal comforts and good form, — look after yourself first. — It pays to be honest. His code of life, Chesterfieldian in scope, utilitarian in nature, and devoid of any Christian principle of morality, is based purely on selfish interests, and might naturally be the dictates of a pagan rather than of a Christian father; nay it does not even rise to the ethical heights of cultured pagans of olden times. They deemed virtue to be its own reward, and inculcated the practice of natural virtue for virtue's sake. This was the highest code of morality, until the advent of Christianity, which superadded the supernatural element to purely natural virtue. Any ethical code constructed on self-interest is a house built on shifting sands; for self-interest ever subject to change, and

always diversified in individuals, can form no common and permanent basis for moral conduct. Virtue, and right, and justice are such, not because they serve personal interests, but on the contrary, no matter how much soever they stand opposed to such interests, still virtue is virtue, and right is right, and justice is justice. They are universal and unchangeable, and upon them is constructed the one true code of morality, which must also be, independently of personal interests, unchangeable and universal.

MISTRUSTED LOVE

Unfortunately for Ophelia, Laertes on departing, reminded her of his counsel in the presence of her father. His words sufficed to rouse the old courtier's prying instinct. Overmastered by curiosity, he insists on knowing the import of his son's advice. He approves the judgment of Laertes, and goes even further, by condemning her for being too free and bounteous of her time with the Prince, and for not understanding what behooves his daughter and her honor. His severe arraignment, while chargeable to solicitude, most commendable in a father, was due more to the low estimate which he entertained of Hamlet's honor and his motives. Like Laertes he could not imagine that the Prince was truly and genuinely in love with Ophelia; because, not being intimately acquainted with him, he knew neither his nobility of character nor his refined moral nature, and, therefore, measured him according to his own low standard.

Learning of the cause of Hamlet's frequent visits, Polonius in excitement catechises his daughter. His impassioned words "extort from her in short sentences, uttered with a bashful reluctance, the confession of Hamlet's love for her, but not a word of her own love for him. The whole scene is managed with inexpressible delicacy; it is one of those in-

stances common in Shakespeare in which we are allowed to perceive what is passing in the mind of a person without any consciousness on their part. Only Ophelia herself is unaware that while she is admitting the extent of Hamlet's courtship, she is also betraying how deep an impression it has made, and how entire is the love with which it is returned."³ Her father's earnestness had impelled her to speak in self-defense; but her attempt to correct his false notions concerning the nature of Hamlet's love, instead of allaying, only irritated more the old chancellor, who, always infallible in his judgments, could neither brook contradiction, nor tolerate any hesitating acceptance of his oracles.

Poor Ophelia, bewildered by his onslaught, knows neither what to say nor think. He will teach her: she must consider herself an inexperienced girl, and not accept Hamlet's words of love as legal tenders of sterling silver, when they are naught but counterfeit; she must look upon his "holy vows" as snares to entrap simpletons who have no more circumspection than a senseless woodcock. Appealing to his own experience, he assures her that love is prodigal of vows, which scarce survive their making. She must, therefore, not believe the Prince's vows, which are brokers, clothed in pious form the better to deceive. In conclusion, he forbids her, henceforth, to meet and speak more with the Lord Hamlet. Her father's words confirming those of Laertes, and blasting even worse the fair name of her lover, make him nothing less than a deceiver and seducer. They affect Ophelia's heart most painfully; for in her ignorance and inexperience she has the greatest confidence in the wisdom of her father and her brother, and, therefore, feels inclined, against her own good judgment, to distrust her lover. This disloyalty reveals a weakness of character, which shall

³ Mrs. Jameson: "Characteristics of Women in Shakespeare".

later lead her into other fatal errors. Without making further defense, Ophelia bows in silence, and with filial respect utters the laconic reply, "I shall obey, my lord." Amid conflicting doubts and in painful heart, she accepts the command to break off her relations with Hamlet; in fact, "to lock herself from his resort, to admit no messengers, and receive no tokens."

In this scene, in which for the first time we are introduced to the old courtier, the dramatist evidently intends to lay the foundation for Hamlet's fixed judgment that he is "a foolish prating knave." Notwithstanding his boasted keenness of perception and ambition to play the wily diplomat, Polonius discloses invariably on every occasion his fatal weakness of stumbling upon the wrong scent, and of blunderingly pursuing it with an obstinacy that leads to his own final ruin.

SCENE FOURTH

SOME VICIOUS MOLE OF NATURE

Our curiosity already highly excited is in fine gratified, when we see Hamlet face to face with his father's spirit. The object of the present scene seems to be to familiarize him sufficiently with the ghost, in order that perceiving its human element, he may lose all terror and amazement, and be prepared to hear with sufficient calm of mind the terrible revelations which in the following scene shall fall upon his astounded ears.

It is the midnight hour. Hamlet is keeping the night-watch with Horatio and the sentinels on duty before the fortified castle of Elsinore. All are awaiting with keenest expectancy the appearance of the nightly walking apparition. Filled with awe of the preternatural, they feel the oppressive silence of the gloom, and seek mutual relief in conversation with the hope of easing their mental strain, as well as their strange sense of fear and expectation.⁴

But the sudden clang of trumpets at the dead of night startles all save Hamlet; in surprise Horatio asks the cause of the alarming noise at that strange hour. The Poet, who more than once alludes to the King's vices of gluttony and drunkenness, emphasizes them more than usual in the present scene. Claudius and his court are shown engaged in one of their frequent midnight drinking frolics, which are usually divers-

⁴ Of this circumstance, Coleridge writes: "The unimportant conversation with which the scene opens, is a proof of Shakespeare's minute knowledge of human nature. It is a well established fact, that on the brink of any serious enterprise or event of moment, men almost invariably endeavor to elude the pressure of their own thoughts by turning aside to trivial objects and familiar circumstances; thus, this dialogue on the platform begins with remarks on the coldness of the air, the time of night, and the striking of the clock".

ified with boisterous dance and mirthful song. When the King in swaggering reel drinks the health of all, it is according to Danish custom, accompanied by blare of trumpets and by beat of drums. Such barbarous customs were most odious to the refined Hamlet, and he looked upon their breach as more honorable than their observance. These frequent royal revels pained him grievously; for he knew from his travels abroad, how they caused foreigners to call the Danes drunkards and to liken them to swine, and so vilify the nation's name and honor.

Laboring under great nervous tension, and eager to subdue his feelings of excitement, Hamlet passes from moralizing on the Danish custom of wassailing, to more general reflections. His speculative turn of mind naturally leads him from the particular to the universal, from the vice of Claudius to failings common to human nature; and in deep philosophy he finds a sedative for his impatient and uneasy feelings. As with Claudius, so it is with men in general. One defect whether natural or acquired, if allowed to grow in strength by habit, will at length break down the very guards of reason, and vitiate in man all that is really good.

“One sad losel soils a name for aye,
 However mighty in the olden time;
 Nor all that heralds rake from confined clay,
 Nor florid prose, nor honeyed lies of rhyme,
 Can blazon evil deeds, or consecrate a crime.”

(Childe Harold)

For confirmation of his argument, Shakespeare borrows from Sacred Scripture the metaphor of a corrupting leaven. “Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.”⁵ “A little leaven corrupteth the whole lump.”⁶ In this sense, St. James affirms: “Whosoever shall keep the whole law, but

⁵ “Matth.” XVI, 6.

⁶ “Gal.” V, 9.

offend in one point is become guilty of all.”” Hence the Poet reasons: let a man be ever so noble in character, be adorned with every virtue; and let that virtue be refined and purified by grace, yet if one blemish or evil trait be found among them, it will taint the very essence of his goodness, and bring him into disrepute in the eyes of his fellowmen.

ANGELS AND MINISTERS OF GRACE

While Hamlet, apparently absorbed in moralizing thought, continues his discourse, he is suddenly interrupted by the alarming words of Horatio, who chances to catch a glimpse of the silently approaching spectre. His surprise is equally shared by the spectator; for as Coleridge remarks: “by thus entangling the attention of the audience in the nice distinctions and parenthetical sentences of this speech, Shakespeare takes them completely by surprise at the appearance of the ghost, which comes upon them in all the suddenness of its character.” The spectre appears in arms, in the full panoply of war, just as the corpse of Hamlet’s father was buried according to Danish custom. This circumstance lends greater solemnity to the scene, whose picturesqueness is heightened by the silvery moon beaming here and there through the openings of the massive battlements.

The sight of the mysterious spectre fills all with fear and amazement. As the solemn ghost silently approaches, Hamlet is suddenly overpowered by awe and terror, and, feeling himself in the grasp of the preternatural, shudders and staggers backwards, uttering from fear the first thought that flashes on his mind. It expresses a sentiment that is distinctly Christian. The force of Hamlet’s exclamatory prayer, like other indices of his Catholic faith, either is not understood, or is silently ignored by certain critics who would make him an

Agnostic, or a Rationalist, or a Positivist, or anything but a Christian, and who are wont to seize upon a few obscure passages in support of their tenets, all the while remaining blind to the clear evidences, multiplied through the drama, of his thorough Catholicity. Considering that Hamlet is a pure creation of Shakespeare's mind, and that he makes him a Christian prince of the eleventh century, it follows that in justice to the Poet, we must view his hero through Catholic eyes, and judge his words and actions according to Christian principles and practises. Such is the fundamental law of rational criticism, and any critic who ignores it, must necessarily misinterpret the Prince, and give us nothing more than a distorted view of his character. If the Poet could not prudently enlarge upon the faith of Hamlet, because he wrote his dramas for presentation at a time when not only his audiences were anti-Catholic, but also when the government pursued a policy of intolerance and persecution, he, nevertheless, from fondness for the old religion, did not fail to enrich the tragedy with lustrous gems, which brilliantly reflect the clear sunshine of Catholic belief.

One of these gems, in the present instance, is Hamlet's invocation of angels and ministers of grace to defend him. In the days of the "great Reformer" and of "good Queen Bess," many treatises were issued and penal laws enacted against the good old Catholic belief and practice of invoking the aid of angels and of saints, as here exemplified by Hamlet. The first few lines of his address to the ghost contain a depth of meaning, which none perhaps but a Catholic mind can fathom. Besides his belief in the power of angels and of saints to hear and help us, he emphatically implies the existence of a heaven and a hell, of good spirits who are the ministers of God's favor, and of evil spirits who are bent on

man's destruction, and of a divine revelation on which these Catholic doctrines are based. Furthermore, his brief and hurried prayer is heightened in force, when we consider that it was uttered in a moment of overpowering fear and terror, which left him no time for reflection. It is a well known fact that men, under such circumstances, invariably utter words to which by frequent use they have become habituated, and which, therefore, without thought come to their lips as it were from custom or second nature. This fact reveals how deeply religion and its supernatural elements were engraven upon the soul of Hamlet and entered into his every day life.

Hamlet as a Christian knew that evil spirits may at times assume various forms, the better to beguile to evil, and, therefore, he doubted whether this spectre-like form of his father were really his ghost or a demon. He was further cognizant of the popular belief that to accost and speak to a ghost, is to invite dire consequences; nevertheless, all regardless whether the spectre before him be a "spirit of health or goblin damned;" whether "he bring grace from heaven or blasts from hell," Hamlet determined to stay the course of his mysterious visitor and to address him in questioning words. His resolve in presence of Horatio and the officers, who are quaking with fear, evinces a wondrous courage and a remarkable strength of will. His invocation of angels and ministers of grace had halted the walking ghost, which, turning in his footsteps, stood facing him. Recognizing now more clearly the form and very features of his father, Hamlet speaks to him in words, whose grandeur reveals the heated state of his mind.

In the course of an animated address, Hamlet slowly draws nearer and nearer, and, fixing his look on the pallid face, gazes into the glassy eyes of his father's spectral form. For the moment he forgets all fear and awe of the preternat-

ural. Fond memories which he cherished return with all their freshness, as he feels himself again in the presence of his idolized father. His heart aglow with filial love and devotion, he passionately appeals on bended knee and with outstretched hands to the solemn, silent shade to answer him. He calls him Hamlet, king, father, and on the last appellation his voice falters in lingering loving accents; and then he utters the climax, "royal Dane," to him, indeed, the Dane of all Danes — the paragon of perfect manhood. In outpouring questions of overmastering eagerness and yearning, he seeks the cause of his unrest, and fears the confirmation of his own foul suspicions. "Tell me," he pleads, "why thy corpse, which we consecrated by sacred rites of burial, has burst its cerements! Why has the sepulchre wherein we laid thee to peaceful rest, opened wide its ponderous and marble jaws to give thee up again? Why dost thou, dread corpse, revisit again in complete armor the glimpses of the moon to make us fear and tremble, to mock and laugh at us, poor fools of nature, who vainly search to know her mysteries, though they are beyond the reach of our souls? O, answer me! — What should we do to bring peace to thy burdened, wandering soul?"

Hamlet's anxious filial desire and impassioned pleadings extort no response from the mute spectre, save a waving of the hand, by which the spirit beckons him to follow apart from his companions. Allowed by divine permission to revisit earth in the cause of justice, the ghost can speak its secret message to no other ears than Hamlet's. It is a purgatorial spirit and, therefore, necessarily good; confirmed in the grace and love of God, it can do no wrong. But to destroy a man's reputation by revealing his secret crimes to others than those whose concern it is to avenge the crime or to right the wrong, is an offence forbidden by the moral law of God. Hence to

Hamlet, who was alone concerned, could the purgatorial ghost disclose the crimes of Claudius and the infidelities of the Queen.

I'LL FOLLOW THEE

Hamlet, who clearly understood the courteous beckonings of the ghost to be expressive of a desire for a secret conference, was as eager to learn its secret message as the spectre was to deliver it. His unflinching resolve to follow, is indicated by word and action, which disclose a wondrous courage and a powerful will. All pale and breathless, with eyes glowing in excitement and intently fixed upon his father's spirit, the Prince slowly follows, now pausing, now advancing, until his companions from fear bordering on terror rush forward to impede his progress. They strive by energetic word and action to turn him from his rash resolve; for, suspecting that the phantom is an evil spirit in the guise of Hamlet's father, they greatly fear for his safety, should he go where it leads. Their words, however, fall heedless on his ears, and wholly fearless and undaunted he follows in the footsteps of the still beckoning ghost. Why should he fear, even though it be an evil spirit? What harm can it do him? As to his body, he does not from weariness of life value it at "a pin's fee." As to his soul, rational philosophy, as well as his religion assure him that it is spiritual and immortal, and, therefore, immune from injury by any fell spirit of the nether world.

Horatio, finding him still insistent on his resolve, appeals to the probable evil design of the phantom: it clearly beckons him onward towards the dreadful summit of the lofty cliff which overhangs the boisterous ocean. There it may suddenly assume some frightful shape, and, depriving him of reason, cause him to cast himself headlong down into the abyss of roaring waters. His words are idle: Hamlet's impatience

only waxes stronger at Horatio's proffered arguments. Still undaunted and in excitement growing with resistance, he brushes him aside, and follows the spectre, which continues to wave him forward. As he advances, Horatio and Marcellus, who are overpowered by fear, hurriedly throw themselves upon him, to hold him back forcibly from certain death. But Hamlet is enraged at their violence, and struggling in their grasp throws them off, as if with preternatural strength,

"Which makes each petty artery in his body
As hardy as the Nemean lion's nerve."

Then with flashing quickness he draws his gleaming sword and swears, by heaven, to make a ghost of the first aggressor.

Horatio and Marcellus, still agitated by fear, now stand back in amazement, and watch Hamlet as with sword extended he passes from their sight, pale and panting, his glistening eye ever fixed upon the beckoning ghost. His disappearance fills them with uneasiness. They feel their obedience was a dereliction of duty, since "he waxes desperate with imagination." Repentant, they now follow after, Marcellus the while uttering unconsciously the cause of the ghost's appearance:

"There is something rotten in the state of Denmark."

So far, there appears nothing in support of the theory which attributes to the Prince cowardice, weakness of will, and irresolution. His action is all to the contrary. His eagerness to encounter the ghost at dead of night; his battling for freedom with naked sword, when his companions use violence to stay his progress; his following alone in darkness the dubious guidance of the "dread spectre:" all exhibit an uncommon courage and energy of will, and these qualities shall be revealed to a still higher degree in the next and closing scene of the First Act.

SCENE FIFTH

A PURGATORIAL VISITOR

We have been gradually prepared for more thrilling action by the coming and the going of the dread-inspiring spectre. His ghastly form and silent stately tread have impressed upon us the presence of an actual ghost, and aroused us to an acute expectation, which is met when with sentiments of awe we listen to his solemn words, as in hollow sounding and unearthly tones he discloses to the Prince's startled ears the well-guarded secret of the grave. Hamlet had followed the ghost through the thick darkness, but, on nearing the beetling cliff, he refused to proceed farther before his spectral guide declared himself and the purpose of his visit. As a Christian he knew on the authority of Sacred Scripture that though the ghost wore his father's form, it might be an evil spirit, whose purpose was to lead him to destruction. At his challenge the ghost stands, and with sepulchral voice discloses that the hour is near at hand, when he must return to purgatorial flames.

His words stir Hamlet to pity, but this sentiment is at once swallowed up by surprise, as with astonishment he hears the word "revenge" fall in hollow tones from the lips of the spectre. For reply he can utter but one questioning word of amazement and perplexity. That word "revenge" inspires a fear that his foul suspicions are indeed verified. All intent, he listens to the ghost's continued narration: once an erring mortal, more sinned against than sinning, he is in very truth, his father's spirit doomed "to sulphurous and tormenting flames," until the sins done in the flesh "are burnt and purged away."

The words of the ghostly visitor are in perfect harmony with Catholic faith. The fact that his father's ghost was a purgatorial spirit, was an unerring proof that he had died free from any grievous or mortal offence against the moral law of God, and was, therefore, in the state of grace, or the friendship of Heaven. But, because of failure in life to atone by good works for grievous sins forgiven, or because, tainted by lesser offences, which, while not incurring eternal reprobation, nevertheless, debar him from a Heaven where nothing defiled can enter, his soul was in a middle state, undergoing purification from all stains or disfigurements, so as to become fit to dwell in the blissful home of angels in union with a God of infinite justice and holiness. This purgatorial spirit, revisiting by divine permission "the glimpses of the moon," comes to unburden its soul of the secrecy of an awful crime known to Claudius and to God alone. After revealing his identity and condition in the world beyond the grave, the ghost, as he affirms, would gladly gratify human curiosity, would blazon forth the awful mysteries of his prison-house in words that would harrow up Hamlet's soul, freeze his young blood, make his two eyes, like stars, start from their spheres; but such eternal blazon must not be made to ears of flesh and blood.

On this subject as on others of the same order, Christian revelation teaches, not what satisfies our curiosity, but only what is necessary for salvation. The Catholic believes these truths on their extrinsic evidence, which is the authority of the Word of God. In the words of the Apostle: "Faith is the evidence of things that appear not,"^s and again, "now we see through a glass in a dark manner, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know even as I am known"^t The Catholic believes truths of divine revelation, not because

^s "Hebr." XI, 1.

^t 1 "Cor." XIII, 12.

of any intrinsic evidence, which forces them upon his intellect, but by the strength of his will, and solely on the Word of God, who, because infinitely wise and holy, can neither deceive us nor be Himself deceived. Hence, the Catholic has for his belief the highest motives of credibility, and bases it upon evidence which, though extrinsic, is unfailing and transcendent. By reason of this extrinsic evidence, his act of faith is free; and because free, it is meritorious; and meritorious because by his faith he offers to God the homage of his intellect and will; and this act of homage is on the divine promise salutary for eternal life. Such faith is the beginning of salvation.¹⁰ Of this faith the Savior spoke when he said to the doubting Thomas: "Because thou hast seen me, Thomas, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and have believed."¹¹ In this world our curiosity may be rewarded by diligent search after natural truths of this our visible creation, but in mortal life we are hopelessly barred from the knowledge of supernatural truths of the invisible world, save such as a kind Providence has deemed it wise to reveal for our salvation. Hence the ghost returning from the invisible world of spirits, was not allowed to disclose to Hamlet other truths concerning his prison-home, than those that are already known to Christians by means of divine revelation.

NATURE OF THE "REVENGE"

Hamlet listened in amazement as the ghost unfolded its woeful tale of suffering. His pity, more and more aroused, racked his heart with an agony which, at his father's appeal to his former fond love, so overpowered his feelings that he called on God for assistance. But, when the ghost for the first time makes the terrible disclosure of the foul and un-

¹⁰ "Hebr." II, 6.

¹¹ "Jno." XX, 29.

natural murder, Hamlet staggers backward, as if stricken by some secret power. Standing in vacant stare, mute and pallid with horror pictured on his face, and, his quivering frame swaying to and fro, he can only mutter, "murder! murder!" The ghost proceeds, however, and his command to avenge the crime, at once excites other passions, and, with an energy of will that conquers all emotion, Hamlet utters from the depths of his soul the passionate cry:

"Haste me to know 't, that I, with wings as swift
As meditation or the thoughts of love
May sweep to my revenge."

A recent commentator who adheres to the theory of Hamlet's weakness of will, discovers in these lines a proof of impotence; for "they convey," he says, "no suggestion of speed at all, but the reverse."¹² Other commentators, he affirms, have not hitherto found any evidence of Hamlet's impotence in the lines. Their critical lapse is indeed no matter of surprise, but rather of commendation; the lines convey not the least suggestion of Hamlet's impotence. As yet he has heard only the words 'murder' and 'revenge', but not the story of his uncle's crime and his mother's infidelity; hence his words express nothing more than an eagerness to hear of the crime and to fly to its revenge with the celerity of thought. As a philosopher versed in the psychology of the human mind, he knew that to think is an act of the immaterial spiritual faculty of the soul, and that an immaterial thought is in action swifter than the flight of an eagle

¹² "How many readers and writers have quoted these words as evidence of Hamlet's good intentions, and how few have found in them evidence of his impotence! There are other figures that he might have used: — 'With wings as swift as wings of eagle swooping upon his prey.' But the wings to which he refers, when striving to express an intention to fly swiftly, are the only ones he possesses, are the brooding wings of meditation. As to 'the thoughts of love', their ebb and flow takes up time. Hamlet's words convey no suggestion of speed at all, but the reverse'. W. F. Trench, "Shakespeare's Hamlet", p. 73.

swooping upon its prey, aye, swifter than a lightning flash. This rapidity of thought becomes more accelerated when the mind is roused to greater activity by the impetus of passion, say of love or of hatred. Hence the philosopher's metaphor is most apt, since it exceeds all others in the notion of rapidity.

If the word "revenge," as uttered by the ghost and again by Hamlet, seem repugnant to Christian minds, it is because the term, once a close synonym of *avenge*, has acquired a far different meaning. *Revenge* is selfish: *avenge* is unselfish. To *revenge* now signifies to inflict upon another some evil through personal anger and resentment: while to *avenge* is to punish a culprit in vindication of law and justice. The former is contrary to Christian ethics, but the latter is sometimes a bounden duty. The task, therefore, imposed upon Hamlet by divine justice in the person of the purgatorial ghost, must not be understood as an illicit, personal, and vindictive retaliation of evil for evil; but a "revenge" which, once synonymous with *avenge*, signifies a righteous retribution and vindication of violated law and justice. Milton so uses the term:

"Avenge, O Lord thy slaughtered saints whose bones
Lie scattered on the alpine mountains cold."

The "revenge" of the ghost, therefore, strictly signifies retribution in the Scriptural sense: "And shall not God *avenge* his own elect?" and again: "Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord, I will repay."

It is repugnant to Christian teaching that a purgatorial spirit, confirmed in the grace and friendship of God and purifying itself for entrance into Heaven, should return to earth to contract a new stain by inciting to sinful, personal revenge. The words of the ghost are all to the contrary. He comes the

messenger of heaven and, as its instrument of retributive justice, discloses only what is necessary for the purpose. He speaks the dread secret, not to Horatio and the sentinels, nor to the Queen, who, though faithless to his love, was innocent of his murder. He does not seek to excite Hamlet's hatred against his uncle by revealing himself like Banquo with bloody countenance all disfigured. He cares more for virtue than for vengeance, hence, he cautions his son against tainting his soul in any attempt to bring Claudius to justice. He comes not on a personal mission, but, as king and patriot, to save his kingdom and people from the grasp of a monster of murder and lechery. He had been, as in the theocracy of old, not only the chosen king of the people, but also, by reason of the unction of holy chrism, the annointed king of the Lord and the guardian of the state in its spiritual and temporal welfare. Therefore, the murderous blow of Claudius was at once a blow at state and religion, a blow at truth and justice, a blow at the moral law, which underlies all political and social order. Hence, the ghost comes as a patriot, clad in the armor of a warrior-king, to vindicate his own sacred rights and those of his son and people, and to unmask and bring to justice a foul criminal, whose monstrous outrages against the divine and natural law have cried aloud to heaven for vengeance. The spectre commends Hamlet's eagerness to punish the criminal. If such a crime were not to stir him, he would indeed be duller than the shapeless mass of weeds which in the infernal regions rises and falls with the tide of Lethe's stream, a river which erases all memories of the past from the minds of those that drink its waters.

SECRETS OF THE GRAVE

His eyes aglow and lips parted, Hamlet in dread suspense listens with eagerness to the ghost's further revelations.

He hears how the serpent whose poisoned fangs caused his father's death, rankly deceived the public by a fictitious account. At this information Hamlet seems seized by some sudden malady; dazed, bewildered, and shuddering with horror, he presses convulsively his throbbing heart as in anguish he mutters, "O my prophetic soul!"

Visibly struggling with his emotions, he bravely labors to regain composure, in order to comprehend the better the ghost's further disclosures. But still confused and wildly staring, he hears in horror of other crimes of Claudius. To him his father's ghost seems again incased in mortal frame of flesh and blood, and stirred by human passions as he dilates upon his loyal love for Gertrude, which "went hand in hand even with the vow he made to her in marriage." But the Queen being all the while in the mask of virtue, a perfidious sinner, when most she seemed a saint, allowed a wretch of poorest gifts to bewitch her to the dual crime of incest and adultery. A virtuous person will not be lured to lewdness though it wear the guise of heaven; but a lustful individual, though linked to an angel of the purest radiance, will, to sate a shameful passion, even "prey on garbage." As the ghost perceives the dawn of day approaching, he hurries on to disclose the manner in which Claudius committed the secret murder, and its leading circumstances.

After a succinct description of the secret crime, the ghost bitterly complains, not so much of the murder, as of the refined cruelty which deprived him of the sacramental rites that are commonly granted to the poorest Christian: he was sent to his eternal account, "unhouselled, disappointed, unan-eled." The complaint is fittingly couched in "old English" terms, which, though now obsolete, were in common use in Shakespeare's time, as well as at the period when the Poet supposes the elder Hamlet to have lived. The first complaint

is that he died "unhouseled," or without receiving the Holy Eucharist. This sacrament, when administered to the dying, is commonly called *Viaticum*, which signifies provision for a journey. It is properly so called, since it is a spiritual provision for the journey, which the soul of the dying man is about to make into eternity. The second complaint is that he died in a disappointing state, or condition, that is, not prepared or shriven. A worthy reception of the Holy Eucharist, or sacrament of the body of Christ requires that a man purify himself by a confession of his sins, in which, if truly penitent, his transgressions are forgiven by virtue of the power which Christ has for this purpose committed to His Church. Both sacraments are referred to in the lines of Walter Scott:

"To die like the houseless dog on yonder common
Unshriven and unhouseled."

The third complaint is that he died "unaneled," or without the sacrament of Extreme Unction. This sacrament of the last unction is administered to those only who are in danger of death by sickness, and in accordance with the express command of St. James, the apostle.¹³ The complaint of the ghost is well understood by Hamlet; for, every Catholic, if in dangerous illness, is most anxious to receive the last sacraments, in order that his soul purified and fortified by grace, may appear with firm hope before the supreme tribunal of infinite justice; nay, even in the case of a bad Catholic, this anxiety for the sacraments is often most extreme, because of the consciousness of the sad condition of his soul. A Catholic only can understand the full significance of the ghost's complaints. He alone can see how in harmony with

¹³ "If any man be sick among you, let him bring in the priests of the Church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord, and the prayer of faith shall save the sick man, and the Lord shall raise him up, and if he be in sins, they shall be forgiven him". (St. James, V, 14-15).

his religion the soul of Hamlet's father on returning from his purgatorial prison, should bitterly complain of being "sent to his account with all his imperfections on his head." His acute sufferings made him feel this privation most keenly, as is clearly indicated by the closing words of his complaint: "O, horrible! O, horrible! most horrible!"

The present passage is a remarkable indication of the Poet's strength of character; for, by enlarging upon distinctly Catholic doctrines, he braved the hostility of a persecuting government whose new state religion declared purgatory, as well as the sacraments of the dying to be naught but "damnable superstitions."¹⁴

A STRICT INJUNCTION

The quickening dawn hastens the departure of the ghost. His last words are most important and significant; significant, because they indicate his moral character. As a purgatorial ghost he will neither do wrong himself, nor counsel his son to do so. The revenge must be, not a personal and vindictive, but a righteous punishment to be measured out according to the laws of God and man. Moreover, the ghost insists that in the punishment of Claudius, Hamlet must not

¹⁴ It has been the constant teaching of the Church, from the very days of the apostles that there exists in the next world, a temporary state of suffering, where the souls of the just expiate offenses committed in this life. This is clearly seen from inscriptions on the tombs of the early Christians in the catacombs, from the writings of the early Fathers, and from the prayers used in her Divine Service. Sacred Scripture assures us "that God will render to every man according to his works". (Matt. XVI, 27). If Divine Justice condemn a man, dying in grievous, or mortal sin to eternal reprobation, a man with a lesser, or venial sin will not, according to right reason, merit the same punishment. There must, therefore, be some other place, where the soul tainted only with slight offenses, may undergo purification: some will be saved, "yet as by fire". (1 Cor. III, 15). Every sin, no matter how light, deserves punishment either here or in the world to come. Sacramental confession washes away the guilt of sin, and remits the eternal penalty due to grievous sins, but not the temporal punishment, which must be undergone in satisfaction to God's justice. The Church does not define the nature and the duration of the punishment of purgatory, nor its situation; but only that there is a place of purgation, and that souls suffering there, may be helped by our prayers and good works.

stain his own soul, nor injure the sinful Queen; for though she be a wicked ingrate, she is still his mother, and, accordingly, he must continue to love and honor her in obedience to the divine mandate. The words of the ghost are noteworthy, because they speak strongly against those un-Christian critics, who insist on blaming Hamlet for not rushing at once upon the King, after the disappearance of the ghost, and slaying him in a cold-blooded personal revenge. Such indeed was the revenge of the original Amleth who, as a barbarian, knew no other law, save that of pagan morals. But our hero is altogether a pure creation of Shakespeare's genius. He has civilized the barbarian, refined him, and idealized him, and made him the paragon of a Christian gentleman, whose every act is in harmony with right conscience, which in turn is regulated by the inviolable and unchangeable moral law of God.

THE REALITY OF THE GHOST

At the disappearance of the ghost, we may pause to consider the strange opinion of Gervinus, an eminent German critic,¹⁵ who maintains that the spectre was merely subjective, nothing more than the creation of Hamlet's heated imagination. Such an opinion appears, indeed, remarkable in the face of the very strong evidence that Shakespeare gives us of the objective reality of the ghost. It is not, however, at all surprising to one who knows the peculiar views and beliefs of Gervinus. Unlike Shakespeare, he was a pronounced Rationalist, and, to be consistent with his tenets, was perforce obliged at any cost to deny the supernatural, to deny the spirit world of angels, whether good or bad, as well as the spirituality of the human soul. Hence, he reasons *a priori*; ghosts are impossible, and, therefore, Hamlet's

¹⁵ "Shakespeare Commentaries", page 562.

ghost was not real but imaginary. Such reasoning is fatuous; it takes for granted the very point to be proved.

The professor, however, offers in support of his dictum another dogmatic assertion, which he deems an all sufficient reason: "Hamlet believes in ghosts and therefore sees them." Such a reason must seem even to the casual reader not only insufficient, but also flimsy. If to believe in ghosts is to see them, then ghostly phenomena would in truth be common occurrences: for, there are many millions who believe in ghosts. What fact is better known than that many on the death of some loved one, often yearn in vain to see them again? Moreover, do not many seek to satisfy this craving by a recourse to spiritists, at whose seances they hope to meet and converse with their departed friends? Clearly, all such have a superabundant faith in the power of disembodied spirits to return to earth, aye, they even earnestly desire it, and nevertheless, Gervinus notwithstanding, their firm belief and yearning remain ineffective and fruitless.

In fine, the theory leaves unexplained how Hamlet, from a vague suspicion concerning the suddenness of his father's death, came by an overheated imagination to the full and true knowledge of the crimes of Claudius with all their particular circumstances, and still more of the infidelity of his mother, of which, before the revelation of the ghost, he would not entertain the least misgiving without supreme repugnance and horror.

The reality of the ghost is the most important element of the tragedy. It is the mainspring of its action. The revenge is based on the revelations of the spectre and its injunction to avenge the crime; and, therefore, unless the drama were to lose its force and interest, the ghost must of necessity be made an objective reality. Hence, the Poet labors through several scenes to portray it vividly with the

view of impressing upon his audience its objective truthfulness. If its mission was to Hamlet alone, and if to him alone it could reveal its "dread secret," why does it appear to the palace guards first and then to Horatio? The purpose of the Poet is evident. If he made the ghost appear to Hamlet only, his audience might, like Gervinus, take it for a merely subjective spectre, conjured up by Hamlet's supersensitively heated imagination. They might further infer that the Prince in his excitement and evidently sincere narration of his vision, had won the belief of the officers, and this belief led them to see the ghost like himself at the appointed time and place. This supposition the dramatist foresaw, and emphatically precludes it by causing the ghost to appear first to the guards several times, and then to the sceptical Horatio, and at last to Hamlet in presence of them all. The Prince must be convinced of the reality of the apparition, or he will never undertake to carry out the sworn revenge, and he is convinced, not only by the evidence of his own senses, but also by the testimony of three eye-witnesses of undoubted character.

A SWORN RESOLVE

Left alone at the sudden disappearance of the ghost, Hamlet finds himself in conflict with emotions which overwhelm his soul. He had risen above all fear when daring to brave the preternatural; but now the atrocities of his uncle's crimes, the guilt of his mother, and the terrible sufferings of the poor ghost, return upon him with astounding force, and bewilder his faculties. His mental strength is undermined for the moment, and his heart becomes a prey to the tumultuous passions of pity, love, horror, hatred, and revenge. Like passions racked the heart of Othello when he exclaimed:

“Never, Iago. Like to the Pontic sea,
Whose icy current and compulsive course
Ne’er feels retiring ebb, but kept due on
To the Propontic and the Hellespont;
Even so my bloody thoughts, with violent pace,
Shall ne’er look back, ne’er ebb to humble love,
Till that a capable and wide revenge
Swallow them up.”

Overmastered for the instant by a thirst for “vengeance,” he calls on the powers of earth, on all the angel choirs of heaven, and is even tempted to invoke the malign spirits of the infernal regions. Though his mind be obsessed by passion, and his feelings roused by an overwhelming sense of wrong, yet he battles against the hellish temptation; for, mindful of the ghost’s injunction, he resists the desire of returning evil for evil in a personal revenge, and with his accustomed Christian energy rejects at once the horrid thought with the exclamation, “O fie! fie!”

Having conquered the temptation, Hamlet’s thoughts turn to his father’s wrongs and sufferings, which re-enkindle his strong filial love into glowing sentiments of duty and devotion, and he solemnly pledges to devote himself and all his powers to the henceforth sacred duty of “revenge.”

His father’s voice still ringing in his ears, the thoughts of his task wholly engrosses his mind, and, as by intuitive glance, he grasps the entire situation, with all its circumstances and insuperable difficulties. He sees the sagacious villain by the usurpation of supreme power, closing against him all the avenues of retribution, and himself, alone amid a fawning and corrupted court as one in a desert wild, whose voice cries aloud in vain for justice. Nevertheless, though the situation be dark and dreary; though the duty imposed upon him involve a task seemingly beyond his own unaided strength, he resolves to undertake it. Unflinching in a firmness which is born of an energy, native to a will heroic in steadfast purpose he decides

to cast to the winds his former life with all its aims and joys, its hopes and loves, and to enter upon another world, where unfettered by purposes common to mankind, he may devote all the energies of his soul to the single purpose of exposing the arch-villain, and inflicting a just punishment upon him.

Though the passage concerning Hamlet's writing on his tablets is usually taken literally, as if he actually wrote down the axiomatic phrase, the supposition seems absurd to many readers. Various suggestions have been offered, but Werder's seems the most acceptable. Look at Hamlet's situation. The ghost has just disappeared, and left him in a state of intense suffering. After efforts of self-control, his repressed passions break out anew, and at this moment flashes upon his heated fancy the phantasmal vision of his 'pernicious' mother and of the crowned hypocrite, the smooth-spoken scoundrel, who has just been smiling on him and calling him 'son'; and in bitter desperate irony he instinctively grasps his tablets, as if to write down his angry burning thoughts; but instead he thrusts repeatedly and with energetic strokes the point of the stylus into the waxen surface in a movement similar to thrusting the sword through the heart of the 'damned smiling villain', at the same time exclaiming, "So uncle, there you are."

A DIFFICULT SITUATION

Hamlet has scarcely sworn his resolve, when the loud calls of Horatio and Marcellus, who approach in eager search, rouse him from his subjective world of wild thoughts and violent emotions. Suddenly awakened to his new situation, he hurriedly decides to guard the secret of the ghost from friends, whose natural curiosity will transform them into unconscious spies: hence, with no time for reflection, he re-

solves at once to enter upon a course of action, which, though strange, is harmonious with his excited feelings. Assuming a roistering and joyful mood, he begins to parody the falconer's cry of Horatio, and receives his astonished friends with the wild and whirling words: "Hillo, ho, ho, boy! Come, bird, come."

Some critics have ascribed Hamlet's strange conduct to the curious exaltation which is known to follow such a mental shock as was given him by the preternatural visitor, the dreadful revelations, and the terrible charge imposed upon him. Others prefer to explain his action by the excitement of delirium and the wanderings of a mind under the first stroke of dementia. May there not, however, be another explanation, and one more natural, because springing from the very circumstances of the incident itself? Hamlet, by nature, frank, truthful, and trustful to tried friends, would no doubt, under ordinary conditions, have not only revealed his secret to these intimates, but also have sought their assistance; but now conscious of his highly excited state of mind, and his inability to hide it fully, and of want of time for premeditated, thoughtful action, his first impulse is, not only to guard the terrible secret, but also, by a wild and distracted exterior, to conceal his violent emotions and painful sufferings. Hence, his boisterous action, his quibbles and enigmatical phrases, his fantastic and ludicrous evasions, and his jesting and making light of the ghost, all to disarm the curiosity of his companions, and to baffle their attempts at discovering his secret.

Unaware of Hamlet's resolve of secrecy, Horatio and Marcellus, impelled by natural curiosity, question him concerning his experience with the ghost. Their curiosity, already great, is still more inflamed by the Prince's repeated insistence upon secrecy. They are, however, painfully sur-

prised to see their keen expectations rewarded by playful raillery. Hamlet had, indeed, at first begun in full sincerity to satisfy in some degree the rational curiosity of his friends; but no sooner had he uttered a few words than he realized the gravity of his alarming disclosure. As a consequence, he instantly checks himself, and closes the sentence with a baffling jest:

“There’s ne’er a villain dwelling in all Denmark —
But he’s an arrant knave.”

He foresees that the revelation of his secret even in a small degree will only provoke a desire for further information; hence, after receiving a gentle reprimand from the staid Horatio, which he takes in good part as justly merited, he cuts off all further questioning, by dismissing them with shake of hand, and with the parting advice to look after pressing affairs: as they have matters which demand attention, so has he. Mindful, moreover, of his feebleness against the difficulties which beset his sworn resolve, he speaks of his own “poor part,” and, from the consciousness of the need of divine aid in the performance of his task, he remarks, “I’ll go pray” to heaven for light and assistance. To Horatio, of course, who is wholly in the dark, these enigmatical words seem nothing but empty badinage, and only irritate him to reply more sharply than before:

“These are but wild and whirling words, my lord.”

Hamlet, who really loved his trusted friend, was quick to show pain at the evident offense, which his quibbles and heartless words had unintentionally given, and at once, while enjoining a restraint of further curiosity, admits by way of apology, that the spectre was not a demon, as they had surmised, but rather a good spirit, in fact, a truthful and “honest ghost.”

"BY SAINT PATRICK"

That the Prince of Denmark should swear by St. Patrick, the patron Saint of distant Ireland, has proven an enigma to many, and various have been the explanations offered. Moberly suggested that as St. Patrick was the patron saint of blunders and confusion, he was fittingly invoked, when "the time was out of joint." Such a blundering animadversion concerning a venerated character was clearly prompted by national and religious prejudice. It may have passed muster with those whose ancestors had for centuries persecuted the race of which St. Patrick is the patron, but it is deemed ludicrous by open-minded and unbiased critics.

A more reasonable solution is offered by Clyde: St. Patrick, a Scotch missionary in Ireland at the beginning of the fifth century, was said to have cleared the island of snakes, and Hamlet is apparently referring to this legend in connection with his father's words, "a serpent stung me."

Warburton's suggestion appears, however, the most probable. He says that in the days of Hamlet all the northern peoples had their learning from Ireland, and that, therefore, the name of the Irish national patron was commonly known among them. Though this suggestion seem ingenious to some, it is, nevertheless, more reasonable than any other offered, because clearly founded upon known historic facts. Certain annotators, who ignore the difficulty, or gloss it over, or treat it superficially like Moberly, may be referred to the *Encyclopædia Britannica*. It says: "The real work of the Irish missionaries in converting the pagans of Britain and central Europe, and sowing the seeds of culture there, has been overlooked, when not willfully misrepresented." Ireland was converted to Christianity in the fifth century, and because of her isolated position, she enjoyed immunity from the incursions of the Northmen until the close of the eighth century.

Historical authorities unanimously affirm, not only that the renown which Ireland's schools of learning attained during this period of calm, attracted many students from England and the Continent, but also that from her schools went forth many men of learning as missionaries to Germany, Friesland, France, and Switzerland, where in propagating Christianity, they laid the foundations of monasteries, which in time became great seats of learning.¹⁷

Considering then the well authenticated facts that Irish missionaries were the pioneers of Christianity and learning among the Teutonic races; that Irish scholars founded many monasteries in Germany, which at great centres of population became renowned schools of learning; and that in these schools were educated the sons of nobles and of kings, we naturally conclude that the name and character of St. Patrick was of common knowledge, and even highly honored and revered among the people that received their religion from Irish missionaries, and their learning from Irish scholars. Hence it is most probable that the Danish Prince of the eleventh century, who imbibed his religion and his philosophy at a school in Germany,¹⁸ knew more of Ireland's national saint, than the average modern Englishman knows of his; and, therefore, the fact that Hamlet swears by St. Patrick seems less strange than that an Englishman swears by St. George.

¹⁷ "The Irish were the first preachers of the Gospel in Germany. In coracles of rude boats of wickerwork covered with tanned hides, they crossed the sea, and pushed up the Rhine and Scheldt. St. Frindolin planted himself in the Rhine island of Seckingen at the foot of the Black Forest. Foilan and Ultan preached on the Meuse. Kilian and Colman and Totnau made Wurtzburg the centre of their apostolic labors. The extraordinary number of monastic institutions of Ireland, not only fostered these splendid missionary enterprises, but offered asylums to half a continent. From England and from Germany, students came to receive in these schools their classical learning, their knowledge of Greek literature of which Irish scholars were passionately fond, and their philosophical and theological training". Guggenberger, "General History of the Christian Era", Vol. 1, p. 196.

¹⁸ Vide P. I. C., V., p. 36. (?)

ST. PATRICK'S PURGATORY

This solution of the difficulty may be satisfactory in so far as it shows that the Poet kept within the probabilities when he made Hamlet familiar with the national saint of Ireland. But, as Shakespeare, after all, is the only one accountable, it may be asked why he used the term "St. Patrick." Was there anything in his mind to suggest the word, or anything in the scene to prompt its use? Both the one and the other query would, from the following consideration, seem to merit an affirmative reply. A few years before the appearance of *The Tragedy of Hamlet*, a play known as *The Honest Wench* was published by Dekker, a dramatist and contemporary of Shakespeare. In it he employs the phrase, "St. Patrick, you know, keeps purgatory." His remark was evidently founded on the well-known legend of St. Patrick's Purgatory; but his erroneous supposition that the Saint was its keeper, shows his unfamiliarity with particulars of the story.

St. Patrick's Purgatory had been the centre of pilgrimages from far remote times, and even to-day attracts annually about three thousand pilgrims. Its entrance is a dark deep cavern situated on a small island in Lough Derg, county of Donegal. The punishments undergone were similar to those which were later described by Dante in the *Divina Commedia*. It is asserted by several writers that Dante was well informed regarding St. Patrick's Purgatory. It is highly probable that he derived his inspiration for the *Purgatorio* from Irish traditions and numerous public pilgrimages with which he must have been familiar from the writings of the historian Bede, as well as from detailed descriptions found in the works of Geraldus Cambrensis, Dionysius Carthusiensis, and Henricus Salterensis, a contemporary of St. Bernard.

Its history is full of Dantesque episodes which have won for the shrine a place in European literature. Its connection

with St. Patrick is not only a constant tradition, but is also supported by historical evidence, and is admitted by the learned Bollandists. After many researches they found the following well authenticated tradition :

“When St. Patrick, in the desire of converting certain wicked nobles, preached to them the terrors of the damned and the joys of the blessed, they replied that they would never be converted to Christ by his preaching and miracles, unless some one of them might see the punishment of the wicked and the happiness of the good, in order to be assured of the truth by facts rather than by promises. In answer to the prayers of the Saint, the Lord led him into a desert place, and showed him a dark deep cavern, saying that anyone dwelling there during one day and night, sincerely penitent and armed with the true faith, would be purified from his sins, and in passing through the cavern would see the torments of the wicked, and also the joys of the blessed.” (*Acta Sanctorum*, XVII. Martii, de S. Patricio in Appendice, parag. V. de Purgatorio S. Patricii.)

It is beyond doubt that the “Purgatory” became famous as a place of pilgrimage and devotion early in the Middle Ages. Medieval chroniclers mention it, and as early as 1120, David, the Rector of Würzburg wrote a graphic description. Pilgrims came not only from all parts of Ireland and Britain, but also from the Continent. Numerous accounts of these foreign pilgrimages were chronicled during the 13th., 14th., and 15th., centuries. On their way to the “Purgatory” in 1358, a Hungarian knight and an Italian nobleman were granted a safe passage through England by King Edward II. King Richard II. accorded a like favor to a knight of Rhodes with a train of 20 horsemen. The shrine was visited in 1516 by a French knight, and in the year following by the Papal Nuncio, Chiericati, who wrote an interesting account of his visit. The “Purgatory” found its way into Italian prose, was made the subject of a romance in the 14th century, and in the 17th was dramatized by Calderon, the Shakespeare of Spain.

It became widely known in England especially from a work, which was composed by Henry, a Benedictine monk, in 1158, and in which Sir Owain, a knight of King Stephen's court, is described as entering and passing through St. Patrick's Purgatory.

From the foregoing facts it is evident that the knowledge of St. Patrick's Purgatory was wide-spread and even common to the English people, and, therefore, that Shakespeare was at least as familiar with it as was Dekker a fellow dramatist. The application of his knowledge is clearly seen in the present instance, if turning back a few lines in the scene, we recall the appearance of the ghost fresh from the fires of purgatory, and the revelation of its terrible sufferings, which so "harrowed up the soul" of Hamlet, and froze "his young blood" that he called on heaven "to bear him stiffly up," lest his heart should fail and his "sinews grow instant old." His heart full of filial love and devotion, was so penetrated by the agonizing words of the purgatorial ghost that he could but cry: "Remember thee! Ay, thou poor *suffering* ghost, while memory holds a seat in this distracted globe!" Before recovering from this state of excitement and deep affliction, he meets Horatio and Marcellus, and a few moments later, with the idea of purgatory and the sufferings of his father still vividly present to his mind, he swears by St. Patrick. Clearly it is a case of association of ideas, in which one thought — the thought of purgatory — recalls to Hamlet's mind another idea with which it was naturally connected.

THE CRUSADER'S OATH

Having in fine partly satisfied the curiosity of his friends, by admitting at least the reality and honesty of the ghost, Hamlet perceives at once the necessity of swearing them to secrecy. If the rumor once reached the court that the ghost

of his father had appeared to him, it would rouse the crafty usurper to set in motion the secret agents of the state, in order to discover the truth. The knowledge would, moreover, irritate the guilty conscience of the king, inflame his mind with suspicions, cause him from fear of strategems to guard himself more closely, and so render the project of revenge still more difficult of attainment. Hamlet, accordingly, with intense earnestness swears his friends to secrecy. Not satisfied with their pledge of Christian faith, he insists on their placing hands upon the uplifted cross-like hilt of his sword, and solemnly swearing by the Christian sign of salvation, "never to disclose what they have seen."

To swear by the edge of the sword was a custom common to pre-Christian pagans; but later, European nations took the oath upon the sword itself. At the time of the crusades, however, when knighthood had reached its highest glory, each aspirant was sworn on the cross-hilt of his sword.¹⁹ The supreme binding force of this oath arose from the fact that it was a religious oath, sworn on the symbol of the cross which had been stained and glorified by the blood of the Savior of mankind, through whom alone there is hope of salvation. The violation of this sacred oath, not only dishonored and unknighthed the culprit, but made him, moreover, a social and sacrilegious outcast among his fellowmen.

Hamlet's insistence on the solemn swearing of his friends for the second time upon the cross-hilt of his sword, as well as his manifest excitement and strange action, was indeed a matter of much wonderment to them. They could in no manner divine his ulterior purpose; but it was of incalculable importance to his design of "revenge" that they should not dis-

¹⁹ The investiture of a Christian knight was a solemn ceremony. The candidate prepared himself by prayer and fasting, watched in arms in a chapel through the night, and on the following morning was with religious rites invested with the rank of knighthood. He was animated by lofty ideals, and vowed by solemn oath to defend, even at the peril of his life, the cause of truth, justice, and religion against all enemies.

close what they had heard, and, therefore, no other oath, save the most sacred would relieve him of anxiety. He himself has foresworn to sacrifice every interest of human life in the performance of a sacred duty. As a fearless knight, he is about to enter the field of combat against a moral monster in the defense of truth, justice, and religion: of truth, by unmasking a villainous hypocrite: of justice, by deposing a murderous usurper; and of religion, by bringing retribution upon a criminal who unscrupulously violated the moral laws of the social and religious order.

Though bewildered by Hamlet's great excitement, Horatio and Marcellus are still more mystified at hearing a voice from beneath the stage urging them repeatedly to swear as the Prince demands. This ghost, or "fellow in the cellarage" whom Hamlet addresses so flippantly and sarcastically, should not be considered the same as the ghost of the dead king. Such a confusion were repugnant to the son's devotion to his father and the marked filial love and respect shown him in the earlier part of the same scene. The discordance is due to the fact that this portion of the text is in all probability borrowed in the main from an earlier tragedy of Hamlet, which had obtained popularity upon the stage. The supposed presence of the ghost "in the cellarage," and Hamlet's strange and disrespectful replies to it, strongly suggest the old *Morality Plays*, which were still prevalent in the Poet's day. In these Plays, spirits or ghosts were concealed beneath the stage, and the player personifying Vice was accustomed to speak familiarly with the evil spirit, and even to jest with him. Set phrases were in common use:—as, "Ah, ha, Boy! are you there?" "Old mole! can'st work in the earth so fast?" These and similar terms from their connection with *Morality Plays*, were clearly understood by Shakespeare's audience. It is, therefore, highly probable that the Poet retained this part of the

older drama without much alteration, because it had become a popular favorite, and above all, because it was likely to stay Hamlet's friends from further curiosity concerning his father's ghost.

Still excited, he now urges with great insistence that his friends swear another and third oath of secrecy: never to disclose their knowledge of his "antic disposition." He can feel secure with nothing less than a solemn oath upon the cross-hilt of his sword. His insistence bewilders Horatio, who supposes that the new oath is to be a mere repetition of the others. In consequence, utterly perplexed, he is unable longer to restrain his feelings of amazement, and utters an exclamation of surprise, which draws from Hamlet the sharp significant retort, that there are more things in heaven and earth than are known in our philosophy.

HAMLET'S AND HORATIO'S PHILOSOPHY

Horatio's philosophy was the same as that of Hamlet's; both had studied at the same school in Germany. But the Prince is now richer in knowledge than his friend. His new experience has exposed the futility of human science in the presence of the supernatural. All natural philosophy is concerned only with our visible world of existence and its causes and effects. When it attempts to invade the realm of the preternatural and still more the supernatural, it finds itself barred at the very threshold of another, but invisible and mysterious world, which must remain forever impenetrable to the purely human mind. How often, notwithstanding Hamlet's *Caveat*, do we see men, eminent in some natural science, wander from their own sphere, and invade a strange and unexplored region where dogmatizing in arrogance, they fatuously expect men of sense to accept them as Sir Oracles whose *ipse dixit* is the final word of truth? Such arrogance recalls the

case of the cobbler who pounded away on his last for six days of the week, and on the seventh mounted the pulpit, and in simple-minded ignorance pounded the Bible with the same energy. Of such, a poet says :

“A little learning is a dangerous thing!
Drink deep, or taste not the Pierian spring;
There shallow draughts intoxicate the brain,
And drinking largely sobers them again.”

But the cobbler at least had reason on his side ; for his whole religion was the Bible only, as interpreted solely by his own light, however imperfect it might be. Far different, however, is the religion of the olden Church. Its theology is constructed on divine revelation as known from Sacred Scripture ; on the oral teachings and practices of the Apostles and their successors, the Fathers of the infant Church ; on doctrines harmonious and well defined by decrees of exact terminology : all constituting a science of theology preëminent in the domain of the supernatural, and which, elucidated and perfected by the greatest minds through successive ages, demands for its mastery a course of study as arduous as that of any human science. If, therefore, in ignorance of this fact or indifferent to it, certain men will blindly enter this *terra incognita*, to dogmatize concerning another science, in which they are not even tyros, it is but natural for them to blunder. If it seem wondrous strange, let them hearken to Shakespeare's philosopher :

“And therefore *as a stranger* give it welcome.
There are more things in Heaven and Earth, Horatio,
Than are dreamt of in our philosophy.”

Though Freethinkers are wont to admire and laud Lord Bacon much, they remain oblivious of his immortal maxim : “A little philosophy inclineth man's mind to atheism ; but depth in philosophy bringeth men's minds about to religion.” Hamlet's words are like Bacon's a manifest stroke at Mater-

ialists and others of the Rationalistic school, who profess to reject all truths save those of sense preception. In view of his newly acquired knowledge, he could well affirm the existence of other and higher truths in Heaven and on Earth than those known to their philosophy. If Shakespeare in his exalted genius, were, as is often affirmed, a man far in advance of his age, we might readily imagine him with eagle eye peering down in prophetic vision through the long drawn avenues of future time, and hearing in surprise the many clamorous contradictions of our modern philosophers. Though living in the twentieth century, they are still ignorant of the import of Hamlet's words to Horatio, and, in consequence, reject the supernatural order and its divinely revealed truths. Of them, Ford, a dramatist and contemporary of Shakespeare wrote:

“These are no school points: Nice philosophy
May tolerate unlikely arguments,
But *Heaven admits no jest*. Wits that presum'd
On wit too much, by striving how to prove
There was no God, with foolish grounds of art
Discover'd first the nearest way to hell,
And filed the world with knavish atheism.”

THE MASQUERADE

After the disappearance of the ghost, Hamlet found himself in a most trying position. We have seen that he had not yet recovered from the terrible and overpowering agony, induced by the appalling revelations from the spirit world, when Horatio and Marcellus broke in suddenly upon him; and how he felt unable to conceal from them the actual condition of his shattered and blighted being. If the outward, irrepressible expression of the torture, the stifled cries of woe, and the agony raging in his inner nature, would lead them to conclude that he is driven to distraction, and perhaps to the borderland of madness, he would nurture their illusion by giving

vent to his feelings, as far as might be, without the betrayal of his secret.

His impulse is instinctively prompted by the situation. He must act on the instant without reflection and do what is most advantageous according to his circumstances. When, however, he observes from his conversation with his friends how the mimicry of madness, so suddenly assumed, has proven, not only a grateful disguise of his troubled spirits, but also an aid in the guarding of his secret, he quickly grasps in a general way the utility to be derived from the continuance of the role. The masquerade, while costing him little trouble and bringing no disgrace, will offer him a ready shelter from the society of his fellow-men, and so afford him ample time to reflect upon the manner and the means whereby he shall accomplish the task of "revenge."

After the revelations of the ghost, he perceives all has been changed around him. His past life in all its relations has been obliterated, and he awakes to the fact that he is in a new world of action in which noble thoughts and aspirations have been expelled by horrid purposes and feelings. His soul now overcharged and his heart oppressed by the terrible secret, he feels he can no longer mingle at court, and breathe its polluted atmosphere. His feigned insanity will free him from attendance, and from the necessity of maintaining friendly relations with the murderer. It will allow him to wander at pleasure, afford opportunities to reconnoitre, and even to peer into the secret life of the King. It will protect him from any nefarious design, since his uncle will see in his evident madness his own absolute hold on the crown. Hence, under the cover of insanity, he can enter upon more active operations against the criminal than would otherwise be possible. If he fail in one attack, he can enter upon another, with the assured protection of assumed imbecility.

His new role will not only conceal the excess of wildness and frivolity, which spring from his highly excited condition, but also remove intolerable restraints and allow him to vent without suspicion, the fires raging in his turbulent soul. Behind the mask he may veil and yet unburden his overheated mind when, in outbursts of extravagance or irony, he gives expression to his burning thoughts, to sentiments of bitterness, and to frozen or fevered feelings, which all the while, though portrayed in mimic madness, will be no more than the expression of his lacerated mind and heart. He foresees that his changed demeanor towards the King, for whom he has the utmost loathing, and towards the Queen, for whom he has lost all respect, will be marked as strange and unaccountable, and be ascribed to a sudden stroke of dementia. Nothing will serve him better. True, he can not taint his soul by murdering the King, but he can, by an assumed madness, conceal from the court, the cause of his grief, and also his sworn resolve to expose his uncle's guilt, and to bring him to condign punishment. But to meet with success, he must guard his counterfeit madness against even the breath of suspicion. Hence, while disclosing to his friends, his purpose of putting on an "antic disposition," he swears them to secrecy in the most solemn manner. This confidential disclosure, though uncalled for and unnecessary on the part of Hamlet, is, nevertheless, very necessary on the part of the audience, in order that sharing in the secret of Horatio, they may like him understand the true position and the part which the hero is to play in the evolution of the dramatic plot.

THE TIME IS OUT OF JOINT

When with their hands upon the cross-hilt of Hamlet's sword, Horatio and Marcellus had sworn by the grace and mercy of God the last and solemn oath of secrecy, and then

kissed the cross, the Prince in turn expressed his love and friendship, and promised that, God willing, he shall not be slow in proving it, even though he be now indeed "so poor a man." The scene closes, as departing together, Hamlet in harassed feelings and bitterness of soul exclaims:

"The time is out of joint:—O cursed spite,
That ever I was born to set it right!"

These last lines have been seized upon by certain commentators as a proof of the theory that Hamlet's character is tainted by cowardice and vacillation. Trench says: "Hamlet here under the stress of his responsibility appears to deteriorate already. For this very religious man, who desires to go and pray, who is careful to distinguish between grace and mercy, and who says 'God willing' with regard to actions in futurity, now irreligiously curses his birth." These assertions are, as shall appear, a shocking misinterpretation which arises from a failure to appreciate Hamlet's strongly Christian character. That he is a very religious man is indeed to his credit, and causes him to seek light and aid from on high for the performance of a task which he does not decline, but which he sees is very difficult; that he distinguishes between grace and mercy, reveals his Christian knowledge; for in fact they are radically distinct as cause and effect; that he says 'God willing' proves his daily life to have been animated by his religious faith. The phrase 'God willing' has always been in common use among devout Christians, and manifests their belief in an all-ruling Providence, who alone is Master of human life and of future activities. That Hamlet has already deteriorated at the close of the first Act, is an assertion so fantastic that its refutation is evident from the consideration of his actual situation.

The ghost had disappeared just a few moments before. Its horrid revelations so astounding, had inflicted upon Hamlet's whole being an overwhelming shock. The intrusion of his

friends had allowed him no time to master his thoughts and feelings, no time to reflect upon his position, nor the nature of his task, nor the how, when, and where of its performance. In a maze of confusion, he perceived, however, its seemingly insuperable difficulties; and, in consequence, uttered the words in question. Yet we are asked to believe that they were spoken in fear by a man, who a few minutes before had out-braved Horatio and Marcellus in superhuman daring and reckless indifference to life.

As Hamlet has so far shown with certainty no weakness of will or irresolution, but rather a fortitude and quickness of decision and action, his words should surely be read in another sense. Is not his cry against the "cursed spite" of fortune, the voice of his irascible nature, which has been profoundly exasperated by a sense of shame, of wrong, of isolation, and above all by the insurmountable difficulties that encompass his task? Any man endowed like Hamlet with a grand moral nature and a keen sense of honor, would naturally experience an affliction of soul and an irritation of feelings at the horrid thought of a father murdered and a mother disgraced by an uncle whose villainy enthroned is abetted by the powers of the state.

Moreover, in presence of his task, Hamlet sees himself in complete isolation. He is estranged from the court of Elsinore, where the Queen enslaved by passion, is blind to her moral degradation, and where the King long addicted to evil is given to riotous revelries. He cannot look for help or guidance to his natural councilors who are now under the power and hostile influence of the criminal monarch. If Horatio, his one trusty friend, be a brave soldier he is no councilor, and without initiative is wholly passive, and devoid of the needed cunning of diplomacy.

Truly "the time is out of joint." Evil surrounds him

everywhere. The more he reflects, the more impossible his task seems to become; not because he feels a naturally strong repugnance to the shedding of human blood; not because he is weak of will and irresolute in character; but because the "revenge" is surrounded by insuperable impediments. Before him is the "smiling damned villain," enthroned in an armed fortress where shrewd and crafty he is prepared to meet every attack. How shall he reach the criminal and bring him to justice? In total darkness and in presence of impassable obstacles he sees neither the way nor the means of procedure. Objective difficulties apparently insurmountable stare him in the face on every side, irritate his soul, and wring from him the cry of agony against his cruel fate. His wish, therefore, that he were never born into a world where good is ignored and evil praised; where virtue is vanquished and crime triumphant, is but a passionate expression which is prompted, not indeed by his rational, but by his irascible nature, and is indicative of his highly wrought feelings consequent upon his vivid sense of utter helplessness. His words express the *cruce* of the drama, and their solution is the tragedy itself.

The Poet would have us understand this fact from the very start; and, therefore, to guard us against the mistaken notion of his hero being a shuffling and vacillating character who, magnificent of intellect, but weak in energy, is ever ready to grasp at excuses for delay, he warns us by the lips of Hamlet at the close of this first Act, that the delay of the "revenge" is due, not to weakness of will, but wholly to subjective and objective causes; that it arises, not from any defect in the hero's character, but entirely and necessarily from the very nature and conditions which underlie the task itself: all this shall be clearly evolved in the progress of the tragic action.

ACT SECOND

SCENE FIRST

THE AGENT'S INSTRUCTIONS

The audience has been roused to a keen and concentrated interest during the preceding Act, and now needs some relief from its high tension of mind. Such relief in the Poet's day was not afforded by orchestral interludes, as in the modern drama, but by means intrinsic to the Play itself. As in *Macbeth* the comic scene of the Porter at the gate brings a grateful interruption of the tense excitement, which was consequent upon Duncan's Murder and its discovery, so in the present instance a senile minister, parading his shallow wisdom, is the innocent and unconscious cause of some moments of restful mirth.

The scene by a skillful strategem impresses upon us the idea of a considerable lapse of time since the departure of Laertes for Paris, and also, as a matter of more importance, discloses the morals common to the social life of the times.

Hamlet and Laertes are pictured according to their different inclinations: the one, a royal prince imbibing intellectual culture and moral refinement among the Christian people of Germany; the other, a courtier, seeking to acquire the knightly accomplishments which were common to the nobles and cavaliers of Paris.

Though the low moral ebb in the social world in which Hamlet was compelled to move on his return to Denmark, stands already revealed in the conduct of Claudius and Gertrude, it is now further illustrated in the senile chancellor, who in euphuistic phrases of seemingly profound instruction,

exposes to Reynaldo his notions of morality, and, as if from his own youthful experience, his low expectations of his son's moral conduct in the distant capital. The disclosure may seem surprising and even contradictory to the trait, characteristic of doting parents: blind and indulgent to the defects of their offspring, they are ever quick to credit any good, and slow to believe any evil of them. In his instruction to the spy, Polonius not only acts against this parental instinct, but, moreover, stoops to disreputable means in order to ferret out the evil habits and inclinations which he supposes natural to his son.

Reynaldo, the agent of the Danish government, is commissioned to visit Paris with the purpose of discovering what "Danskens," or Danes dwell there, by what means they live, what they spend, and what kind of company they keep. In particular, he is to mingle with the associates of Laertes, and learn from them the course of his life in Paris. These minute and superabundant instructions of Polonius exhibit his characteristic conceit. Loath to acknowledge any acumen or even common sense in his accredited agent, he proceeds laboriously to illumine Reynaldo in the futile cunning of his own diplomacy, and to initiate him in his boasted method of stealing upon the truth, as a sneak-thief, unawares.

Reynaldo must claim some slight acquaintance with Laertes, and by innuendoes hint at his "wanton, wild, and usual slips as are common to youth and liberty;" such as drinking, swearing, quarelling, and drabbing. These, however, he must consider light, as the "taints of liberty, the outbreaks of a fiery mind, and the wildness of untamed blood." The character of Laertes being thus besmirched, his companions will readily admit his faults, his carousals, gambling, spendthrift ways, and other taints; and thus by cunning, by round-about ways, and by trials of his inclinations, Rey-

naldo shall "by indirections find directions out." In fine, he must keep his eye upon the son, and, without restraining him in the indulgence of his passions, let him ply his course, so as the more surely to reveal his weaknesses and inclinations. The whole lecture exhibits the low morals of the old chancellor, who in senile weakness of intellect, loses himself in meaningless distinctions, and, though subject to frequent lapse of memory, still clings to his former devious and dishonorable ways.

The low estimate which Polonius had of the moral character of his son was the consequence of his loss of faith in humanity. He was wont to assume it to be totally depraved, and, accordingly, we see him ready to distrust his own daughter's virtue, to malign without scruple the pure character of the noble minded Hamlet, and even to take for granted the existence of such evil traits and practices in his own loved son, as would taint the reputation of an honorable pagan, no less than that of a Christian gentleman. Persons of a low moral life are usually inclined to judge others by their own standards.

Polonius is in all probability a burlesque of the old prime minister of Elizabeth. The latter was in his dotage when Shakespeare knew him, and as delineated by Macaulay and Lingard reflected certain noted traits of the minister of Claudius. An impelling motive for caricature was the strong dislike which was inspired by Burghley's cruel treatment of the Poet's maternal relative, as well as of his patrons. As a like feeling caused him to ridicule sir Lucy in the ludicrous Justice Shallow, so we have weighty reasons for supposing that a more intense dislike prompted him to caricature in Polonius the aged minister of Elizabeth. Burghley's policy was identical with that of which Polonius boasts to Reynaldo. Of his

treatment of those who were arrested for ministering secretly to the religious wants of their persecuted Catholic brethren, Seldon writes: "Before they come to their trial, they are cozened to confess upon examination. Upon this trick, they are made to believe that somebody had confessed before them; and then they think it a piece of honor to be clear and ingenuous, and that destroys them."²⁰ That this cozenage was familiar to Burghley is shown by his letter to Puckering under date of August 30, 1592, and by many instances, one of which is the case of Campion as recorded by Lingard.²¹ His practice, says Simpson,²² falls in exactly with Shakespeare's picture of Polonius instructing Reynaldo how "by the bait of falsehood to take the carp of truth," and "by indirections to find directions out."

There is a special purpose in thus disclosing the characteristic meanness of Polonius. We are to realize that the Prince's dislike of him was not the result of prejudice; that the revulsion of feeling and contempt, which he always felt, and which he was never slow to manifest in the presence of the "prating old fool," was due to elements which are as mutually destructive as are fire and water. Their ideals and principles were contradictory. Hamlet, the idealist, worshipped the good, the beautiful, and the true; but these sentiments had no attraction for the old chancellor, who as a politician dealt largely with the bad and ignoble side of human nature, and, under the guise of diplomacy, resorted to the cunning of hypocrisy. Qualities so opposed inevitably brought on a conflict in which, as in the clash of flint and steel, Hamlet never failed in flash of satire, of scornful sarcasm, or of raillery.

²⁰ Cf. Richard Simpson's "Life of Edmund Campion", p. 354.

²¹ Cf. "History of England", Vol. VI, c. 5.

²² *Ibidem*.

A DISCLOSURE

Another purpose of the Poet is to allow us to see the moral nature of Laertes through his own father's eyes: "an honest father knows his own son." If a brother's love for a sister has blinded several critics to the true character of Laertes, as revealed in the drama; if they enlarge and grow eloquent upon his natural affection, and proclaim it a grand quality, which must ennoble him in the eyes of all; their criticism seems superficial and is certainly misleading. Laertes' affection for his sister cannot redeem other evil traits of his moral nature. Such love is instinctive in pagan, Jew, or Christian, and, moreover, is not a characteristic quality which distinguishes the virtuous from the vicious, nor even a specific difference between man and the brute creation. Hence, the well-known fact that, though a man has shipwrecked his moral nature in the slough of evil, and become a criminal of the worst type, there still lives in his heart a flame of instinctive affection for a sister or a brother. This natural love, therefore, because instinctive, can of itself neither elevate nor ennoble a man's moral nature, when otherwise attainted by moral evil.

Shakespeare, as a consequence, does not enlarge upon this affection of Laertes for his sister, even though it be the most striking quality of a man, who, in contrast to the hero of the drama, is weak in mind and morals. If in a later scene, he causes him to manifest it at the grave of Ophelia, in a form unseemingly exaggerated, it is only to inflame and emphasize the nobler love of a nobler man who loves her more than "forty thousand brothers." If in the present scene, the Poet designs us to see Laertes as his father sees him, and to have the same opinion of his moral life, it is to prepare us all unconsciously against a great shock, when later we shall

see him enter so readily and unscrupulously into a vile and cowardly plot against the life of a Prince, whom he knows to be his friend, sincere, innocent, and honorable.

AN UNANNOUNCED VISITOR

Polonius had scarcely said farewell to Reynaldo, when his daughter in breathless excitement rushes into his presence to tell how Hamlet had just now entered her sewing closet, and, without uttering a word, stood before her, pale and trembling, with tortured look, and apparel all disordered. His strange appearance had astonished and affrighted her. She was unaware of the new grief that afflicted the Prince's mind. It was a grief of cumulative intensity, induced by the ghostly revelation of his father's murder, his uncle's treachery, and his mother's perfidy. In its combined force it had almost smothered his belief in womankind; but he fondly clung to the lingering hope that he could still trust the fidelity of Ophelia. From ignorance of a sinful world, he had loved her hitherto through all the days of his joyous youth, and was loth to mistrust her affection and sincerity. If at the disappearance of the ghost he had sworn to

“Wipe away all trivial fond records,
All saws of books, all forms, all pressures past,
That youth and observation copied there,”

it was because he felt that the sacred duty which his father's spirit had imposed upon him, necessarily shut out all human joy and love. His resolve, however, was less easy of fulfilment than he had thought. Ophelia's refusal of his letters and his visits had roused him to realize that his love for her, though foresworn, still survived with uncommon strength. He had loved her better than he knew, had called her his soul's idol, and, after his mother, his ideal woman. If the tumult

of other passions had for the moment crowded out his affection, it now proved itself unchanged and permanent. Need his love for her so antagonize his sworn task as to leave no room for both within his heart? Whatever doubt he felt was increased by Ophelia's passiveness and ready compliance with her father's orders. Her action, so unlike a genuine lover's, deeply afflicted him. If she, the love of his youth and the only woman whom he still believed and trusted, repelled his letters, and denied him her presence, he struggled in mental affliction to believe that she acted solely at her father's command, and that, true to his love, she was not false like his mother. To see for himself and to test the truth, he threw aside all ceremony, and unannounced hurriedly entered her apartment.

As Ophelia's description of Hamlet's visit follows immediately after his interview with the ghost, many readers naturally imagine that he went at once to see her, and in the same attire, which was disordered from his violent tussle with Horatio and Marcellus, and before he had fully recovered from the shock, which that dreadful revelation had brought upon him. Yet, between the present scene and the one in which Polonius forbade his daughter to have further relations with Hamlet, either in person or by letter, some days must be supposed to intervene. During this period, Hamlet more than once tried to meet Ophelia, and only after his visits were repeatedly declined, and his letters rejected, did he make the unannounced call. It was not, as is often supposed, the occasion of his first display of madness; Claudius and Polonius were already aware of his "antic disposition"; the former, from anxiety to discover its cause, had sent for Rosencrantz and Guildenstern; and the latter now ascribed it to the "ecstasy of love."

Since Hamlet's dementia was, therefore, already rumored through the court, he must in this visit act in harmony with his role. Accordingly, though strong in the sense of honor and unchanged in his affection, he assumes a semblance of rudeness, which, because unusual to his refined nature, would the more readily confirm all in their notion of his madness. In his present grief and mental state of high excitement, he had little need of effort to sustain his new role in the scene with Ophelia. If his anguish of mind and heart is pictured in piteous looks that speak of horrors; if his overwhelming emotions of soul reacting outwardly in the pallor of his face, in the tremor of his limbs, and in inability of speech, prompt Ophelia to suppose him insane, it will, if she prove untrue, confirm the court in the assumption of his real madness. His present overwrought feeling is, however, real and unfeigned. Immersed in a sea of misery, wherein he sees the wreck of his life with all his former hopes and purposes, he is determined by one supreme struggle to snatch, if possible, his one only love from the floating wreckage.

He approaches Ophelia with emotions beyond expression. He seizes her wrist, and holding her at arm's length, scans her countenance, which was so long accustomed to beam upon him with the bright light of affection. His eyes aglow with excitement, he gazes in earnest and bewildering looks to read her secret soul, to discover there the truth of her love or perfidy. Long is that searching, fevered glance of his hungry eyes groping for truth; he is seeking to solve the mystery of her strange conduct; seeking to discover if his idol is of a free noble nature or of a craven spirit; seeking if truth beam in her eye, and reveal love, virtue, and loyalty; seeking with fond hope to find in her a sufficient largeness of soul to be made his one confidant in the dread secret which overwhelms his mind and heart, and, perhaps, by sympathy if not by

counsel, to aid him in the pursuit of his task. But, alas! poor Ophelia, astonished, amazed, and bewildered, sits impassive, as if spellbound by hypnotic dream. She gazes with eyes wide open in vacant stare, and with parted lips remains unresponsive to the mute questionings of her afflicted lover. No discernment beams in her eyes, no throb of love seems to pulsate her heart, and from her lips escapes no sigh, nor word of sympathy, nor affection, nor explanation of her harsh conduct towards the Prince, who, all unconscious to her, is pleading in trembling agonizing emotion to retain her love. Need it seem strange, if he can utter no word, if his gestures betray his deep affliction at reading her soul, and finding there nothing to indicate her love and constancy? Her confession of weakness and her inability to understand him, have confirmed his fears. With dumb amazement he drops her hand, and, retiring in silence, gives the sad and parting glance of a dying love, while uttering a "sigh so piteous and profound as to shatter all his bulk and his being." His heart-rending departure was the farewell to his belief and trust in woman. His dead love shall awaken again, but only at her open grave.

The very recent rumor of Hamlet's dementia had not yet reached Ophelia, and, in consequence, she, while much surprised at his conduct, does not ascribe it to madness. Her mind had been so held captive by his amazing action, looks, and gestures that she could not for the moment think or utter one questioning word to discover the deep import of their meaning. This was unfortunate for both; for it widened the breach, and made it permanent between them. Hamlet, under the impulse of love, had until this visit hoped against hope, and battled against suspicion; but when her conduct had exposed most sadly her lack of native vigor, of mental discernment, and of energy of will, he felt his fond

hope of making her a silent partner in the one sole project of his life, to be completely shattered by the weakness of her character. He had dreamed of somehow saving her at least from the awful ruin that was sure to follow upon the accomplishment of his sworn "revenge."

OPHELIA REVEALS A SECRET

When immediately upon Hamlet's departure, Ophelia in complete bewilderment had hastened to her father to describe the painful scene, the old chancellor, who prided himself on having for every effect some ready cause at hand, could see in the Prince's conduct nothing but madness—madness for Ophelia's love. Whatever may have been his astuteness in palmier days, his boasted craftiness was, at least in his dotage, always seen to set him on the wrong scent. For a moment he philosophizes on Hamlet's ecstasy of love, which, because one of the most potent passions that affect human nature, often leads, when thwarted, to rash and desperate undertakings. He expresses with deep conceit his regret at the harsh commands, which he had given his daughter, and which had caused this madness of 'ecstatic' love.

Polonius was inevitably doomed to misunderstand Hamlet's character. Blind to his nobility of mind and lofty moral nature, he was unable to comprehend and appreciate the ethical principles which were the mainspring of his actions. He could, in consequence, only judge his conduct according to the less noble norms he knew, and these alone ruled his little world of selfish interests. By vilifying Hamlet, traducing his honor, and debasing his honest motives, he had blighted Ophelia's love; but now, as a pendulum, he swings to the opposite extreme, and, in the vanity of parental pride, readily admits the reality of the Prince's love—a love genuine, honorable, and unbounded; such a love alone could drive

Hamlet to his present desperation. Too late he regrets that, from lack of observation and of judgment, he had mistaken fatherly fears for facts. Blaming his jealousy and confessing to Ophelia his want of discretion, he excuses it on the plea that old men are too often overmatched by excessive prudence, as youth are by want of foresight and reflection.

This salve applied to his conscience in easement of his rash and dishonorable judgment, he hurries off with his daughter to the King, rejoicing in the characteristic astuteness, which had enabled him to discover before all others the secret for which the king and his court were eagerly searching—the cause of Hamlet's madness. The concealment of the Prince's secret love for his daughter, might bring evil on himself, while its revealment, though rousing the displeasure of Hamlet, will surely merit the favor of the King. The latter is to him far weightier in the scales than the former.

SCENE SECOND

THE SUMMONS OF HAMLET'S YOUNG FRIENDS

In the meanwhile Hamlet, having by his antic disposition impressed on all the apparent truth of his unbalanced mind, was now the one topic at the royal court. His madness was the sole question which every one discussed. However much they differed as to the cause of his sudden malady, all agreed on the fact—all save the King. A guilty conscience made him more alert and a still keener observer. His suspicion was excited by Hamlet's change as manifested, not so much by his external "transformation", as by his conduct towards himself. In the belief that his crime was known to himself and to God alone, Claudius had hitherto thought himself immune from danger; but his restless conscience, now stirred anew, urged him to ascertain the cause of the Prince's changed behavior. It might perhaps be Hamlet's disappointed ambition of the throne; it might be—a thing he greatly feared—that he had obtained some information concerning the murder. In either case he might plot or conspire in the guise of a madman, and become a menace to himself and the realm. Hence, there arose at once a conflict between Claudius and the Prince, in which the former set to work the machinery of the state in an endeavor to penetrate the heart of Hamlet's secret, and the latter to defend it securely behind an impenetrable mask.

To aid him in his purpose, the King hastily summons two young courtiers, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. He greets them warmly and explains the reason for their call. Young Hamlet, their friend, having undergone a transforma-

tion, is neither the same "exterior nor inward man" that he was. Though his surprising malady is commonly ascribed to excessive grief over his father's death, there is reason to suspect some other and secret cause. Hence, he desires them, as intimates of the same age and humor with the Prince, to dwell for a time in the royal palace, where, in daily association with him, they may distract him from his grief, draw him on to pleasures and amusements, and, from their frequent conversations, learn if there be anything beyond his father's death to account for his exterior and especially for his "inward transformation," which is most noted in his changed conduct towards himself.

The secret purpose of Claudius, which lay concealed beneath his business-like and formal speech, was of course unsuspected by the Queen. She in turn, impelled alone by motherly solicitude, addresses the young courtiers in more impassioned and urgent terms. She knew them better than her consort did, knew them intimately and felt for them a motherly affection, for from childhood they had been brought up with her son, had probably served in boyhood as pages in the court of the elder Hamlet, and later had been his schoolmates. Her son, she assures them, still entertains for them the strongest friendship, and has often made them the subject of conversation with her. Appealing, therefore, not only to their good will as loyal courtiers, but more to the memory of the strong love which bound them so long in friendship, she earnestly requests them under promises of her royal favor to tax their ingenuity in efforts to discover the secret trouble of her "too much changed son."

She had at first attributed his melancholy solely to an overmastering grief over his father's death; but his present conduct, which, all unknown to her, results from his secret knowledge of the crime of Claudius, and from his dark and

gruesome suspicion concerning her own greater or less complicity therein, makes the supposition seem inadequate to explain his changed action towards the King, and even more towards herself. In reply, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern with true courtly style bow their acknowledgment of the royal favor, and, protesting that their sovereigns' pleasure is always a command, place themselves in obedient service at their feet. The Queen in eagerness at once commands an attendant to lead them to her son, and Guildenstern departing invokes the aid of Heaven to make their sojourn and service most agreeable and salutary for the Prince.

POLONIUS INTRODUCES THE AMBASSADORS

When last seen, Polonius was hurrying away to court to announce his great discovery. On reflection he perceived that if the cause of Hamlet's dementia should reach the King from other sources than himself, his silence might result in serious consequences. The King might reasonably suspect that from a spirit of ambition he had encouraged the courtship of the Prince, and only now revealed it when it was no longer in his power to conceal it. Under these circumstances, Polonius was glad to meet the ambassadors who had just returned from Norway, and were awaiting an audience with the King. Fortunately, their mission was highly successful; and their joyous news would surely put his majesty in the best of humor. The moment seemed, accordingly, the most opportune for Polonius, and, detaining the ambassadors without, he hastens to the royal presence to be the first to announce the glad tidings.

Graciously received by Claudius and congratulated as "the father of good news," he further ingratiates himself by the strong affirmation that he holds his duty as he does his soul, both to God and his "gracious King." This loyal

protestation is in the whole drama the sole disclosure of the minister's acquaintance with Christian principles. His words affirming a dual allegiance on the part of man, the one due to God and the other to the King, voice a truth which is a fundamental principle of the Christian religion. It was first proclaimed by the Savior in the world-famous dictum: "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's."

Considering the portrayal of Polonius' character, we may readily believe that, as a time-serving courtier who would serve his King better than his God, we need not suppose that, while he admitted the existence of the dual power of Church and State, he was much concerned with the interests of the former, but merely invoked the principle, in order to gain by a courtly compliment the good will of his sovereign.

On learning of the purpose of his minister's visit, the King is no less anxious to hear the secret than Polonius is to disclose it. The latter delays in the hope that his news shall be as a dessert "to the great feast" which the ambassadors will serve in the letter from Norway's King. Desirous of making the most of his great discovery, the minister insists on awaiting the more opportune moment when Claudius in the best of humor shall be more inclined to grant him a lengthy private audience. The Queen, however, seems little concerned with Polonius' boasted discovery; because, she still clings to the opinion that her son's malady is due to great grief and to her overhasty marriage.

Following the exit of Polonius, the ambassadors Voltimand and Cornelius enter, and are warmly greeted by Claudius. He had sent them on a special embassy to the King of Norway with letters of protest against the military preparations of his nephew, the young Fortinbras. The latter was

levying troops ostensibly for an attack on Poland, but in reality for an invasion of Denmark, with the view of regaining the territory that had been won by the elder Hamlet. On learning of his nephew's design, the aged and infirm monarch rebuked him, and caused him to enter into a solemn compact of peace with Denmark. He allowed him, however, to lead his new levies against the hostile Polacks, and by letter requests of Claudius that he grant them a free and peaceful passage through Danish territory. The King compliments his ambassadors on their success in averting the impending war, and, in dismissing them, gives a token of his good will, by inviting them to feast with him that same evening. The low morals of Claudius are again emphasized by showing how he seizes on every incident as an excuse for indulging his evil habit of revelry and carousal.

A DISCOVERY

During the interview of the ambassadors, Polonius withdrew to the ante-chamber, where in anxiety he was mentally rehearsing the speech by which he hoped to impress upon Claudius his acumen and keen foresight. At the exit of Voltimand and Cornelius, he hastens with evident eagerness into the royal presence to communicate his fortunate discovery. With a self-conceit no less ludicrous than his late effusion of loyalty to the criminal usurper, he begins his well prepared speech, in which, preferring, as usual, the devious to the direct, he prefaces the simple fact of his discovery by many high sounding and euphuistic phrases. At the manifest impatience of the royal pair, he quotes the saw, "brevity is the soul of wit," and yet, unmindful of either, runs on heaping meaningless phrase on phrase, until the Queen, in restless irritation at his speaking so airily and glibly of her son's malady, attempts to stay his stream of words by the tart

command, "more matter with less art." The old man, however, undaunted and unheeding, merely pauses to protest against all art and, after promising to be brief, runs on as before in meandering flow, babbling like the brimming brooklet. At the close of his set speech, he produces with an air of assured triumph the Prince's love-letter to Ophelia.

However much Ophelia may have shrunk from betraying a secret, she had with docility delivered up the letter to her father, who now offers it to Claudius in positive proof of his theory that Hamlet's madness is due to love for his daughter. This letter offered as evidence is indeed a strange document. Though it bears no date, we may reasonably assume that it was recent, and in fact written after his repeated failures to see Ophelia, and after he had begun to enact the role of madman. Its oddity and crudity of form, irrespective of the underlying sentiments, though wholly unworthy of a man of Hamlet's attainments, are however, in perfect consonance with his present presumably mad condition. A certain philosopher has said that the passion of love is a madness. His dictum seems approved by many instances of amatory missives which, preserved to posterity, rouse in the reader either sentiments of pity or amusement. No man had a deeper and more extensive knowledge of human nature than Shakespeare, and his seems to have been the view of the philosopher:

"Lovers and madmen have such seething brains,
Such shaping fantasies, that apprehend
More than cool reason ever comprehends.
The lunatic, the lover, and the poet,
Are of imagination all compact."

(*Midsum. Night's Dream* V. 1.)

If, therefore, the dramatist couples lovers with lunatics, we see why he caused Hamlet, who wished to be deemed mad,

to pen a letter characteristic of a lunatic lover. Already enacting the madman at court, the Prince saw the need of consistent action. He perceived that Ophelia's repulse of his love might readily be made the apparent cause of his disturbance of mind, and even offer a plausible reason for the madness he assumes. For him it was of supreme importance, to have the rumor of his madness believed and propagated, if he would attain his sworn resolve. He must, therefore, make his counterfeit madness appear most specious, for men believe the extraordinary more readily, when they see some apparent cause, which sufficiently explains it, and such a cause they would see in his mad love-letter.

Hamlet, moreover, had another purpose in view. Aware that Polonius was responsible for Ophelia's conduct, and also that he was guilty of aspersing his character and of maligning his honorable intentions, he was in fear lest the daughter should believe the defamatory words of her father, and, in consequence, he decided to enter a protest by means of a letter which, while expressing his deep grief and supreme love, he would make incoherent in thought, and couch in a form crude and grotesque, with the hope that on the one hand, Ophelia would read therein his strong sentiments of love and distress, and on the other, her father, into whose hands it would surely fall, would hold it as a firm proof of his unbalanced mind. Hence, he signs it, as seen in the First Quarto, 'Thine ever the most *unhappy* Prince Hamlet.' Such was the letter which Polonius was now reading and commenting upon at court. In the fond conceit of being no common connoisseur of literary merit, he was unable to restrain the impulse to pause here and there in criticism of some word or phrase. One which displeased him much was the term "the most beautified Ophelia". "Beautified," he says, "is an ill, a vile phrase."—His daughter's use of cosmetics is

again referred to in a later scene, when Hamlet says: "God has given you one face and you make yourself another." The King, however, and his minister were both in happy humor, and the latter more concerned with setting himself right in the eyes of his master, gave little thought to the Queen's strong affection and motherly sympathy for her distracted son, and, in consequence, was unconscious of the offence he was giving her, not only by making public without her son's authority a secret letter which he had surreptitiously obtained, but also by his flippant criticism and slighting remarks, which exposed her afflicted son to ridicule in the eyes of the court. Suppressing her irritated feelings, Gertrude, after casting doubt on the old man's veracity by questioning the genuineness of the letter, turns to leave the unpleasant scene. Polonius, however, in surprise and alarm stays her by exclaiming in humble tone, "good madam, stay awhile; I will be faithful." True to his word, he proceeds demurely to read the letter through without further comment or criticism.

A RUSE

The ruse of Hamlet worked to perfection; the conclusion which Polonius drew from the letter, and his report to the court were precisely what the Prince had foreseen and desired. If as yet no adequate cause had been assigned for his new affliction, now all would believe that the letter was clear evidence of the nature of his malady, and this belief would aid him to guard his own secret. If the King was not deceived like his court by the theory of Polonius, it was because, unbiased by fatherly pride and armed with secret knowledge, he had reason to distrust his chancellor's diagnosis. Prompted by this distrust, he cross-questioned him on the one point of interest: how did Ophelia receive his love?

Did she encourage his courtship? These were questions which Polonius most feared, and for the avoidance of which he had hastened to the court with Hamlet's letter. The King's questions manifestly nettled him; they seemed to imply ambition on his part, and a consequent neglect of duty in failing to nip in the bud the flowering love of his daughter.

It appeared evident to Claudius that, if Ophelia had not encouraged the Prince, his love would not have grown to such proportions. In reply, the old minister warmly protests his fidelity to the King and to his own honor, and to set himself in the most favorable light, resorts to pure fabrication, in which, according to his usual boasted omniscience, he claims to have discovered by his own sagacity, the intrigue of the young lovers, and at once to have thwarted their attempted misalliance; and all because he knew that, according to the custom of the realm, the Lord Hamlet was a prince out of line with his daughter. In consequence of his intermeddling action, he confidently assures the King, Hamlet fell into his present madness. The humor of the situation is intensified by the old man's positive adherence to his theory, and by the ridicule which he draws upon himself unwittingly by proffering for reality, an imaginary process of Hamlet's dementation. His speech reaches its climax when he boasts how, no less than a most skilful physician, he had noted the progressive steps in its development.

How plausible soever the story of the minister might seem, it failed to convince Claudius. His strong expression of persevering doubt puzzled and pained Polonius. The latter, in his imaginary infallibility always felt irritation at any questioning doubt after he had once pronounced his judgment; and, therefore, from ruffled feelings he brusquely appeals to his record, and boldly challenges Claudius to recall, if he can, one occasion when his *ipse dixit* proved false. But he

is only further roused by the King's non-committal reply; and in protest he offers to stake his life on the correctness of his theory. Truth can not escape him; he will find it even though it be hidden in the centre of the earth. When the King, however, still continuing to doubt, proposes a further test for proof of the claim of his minister, Polonius gladly promises to bring the lovers together in a secret meeting. So confident is he of his diagnosis of Hamlet's malady that he again boldly challenges the King:

"If he love her not,
And be not from his reason fall'n thereon,
Let me be no assistant for a state,
But keep a farm and carters."

AN UNWELCOME VISITOR

An opportunity for the test was offered sooner than expected. Hamlet was known "to walk sometimes for hours together in the lobby;" and at such a time Polonius proposes to "let loose his daughter to him," and he and Claudius, concealed behind the mural tapestries, can espy the "encounter" of the lovers. If the test prove his theory of Hamlet's madness false, then the chancellor is willing, as was seen, to be deposed from office and return to humble peasant life. While he was thus addressing the King, the Queen, on gazing through the open portal, observed her son approaching, and exclaimed: "Look where sadly the poor wretch comes reading." Instantly the old minister hurries away the royal pair, and, while pointing in excitement towards Hamlet, affirms with confidence, "I'll board him presently."

Pausing for some moments, he watches the Prince, who, slowly promenading up and down the lobby, seems all absorbed in the perusal of a book of satire. As he approaches, Polonius bowing deferentially begs leave to interrupt his

reading. The Prince, surprised at the intrusion of the unwelcome visitor, exclaims in weariness of soul, "well, God-amer-
cy." Such a prayer uttered without premeditation and, as it were from habit, is a characteristic of Hamlet's practical Christian faith.

The humorous dialogue which follows bristles with keen wit, as now in irony and now in satire, the old angler is lashed with secret stings; but he seemingly disregards them, because of his firm belief in the Prince's madness. Aware of his illusion, Hamlet seeks to confirm him the more therein, and this was an easy task, since it required only an exaggerated expression of thoughts and feelings. His dislike for Polonius was but natural, and would have caused antagonism even under other circumstances. Their natures were cast in different moulds. Hamlet's love of truth and virtue, and of the direct and open paths of honesty, engendered an insufferable antipathy for the shallowness and falsehood of the superannuated statesman, who gloried in devious and crooked ways, and in the cunning of questionable diplomacy. Small, therefore, was the provocation ordinarily required to rouse him to hostile action against a character so opposite. But Hamlet found other elements of aversion in the fact that Polonius, as the chief minister of state, had intrigued for the succession of Claudius to the crown; had prompted his uncle's incestuous marriage with his mother; had maligned his honorable motives, tainted his good name, and slanderously blighted the love of Ophelia, whom he distrusting-ly immured: and this man even now, unaware of his foolhardiness and senility, comes in shambling dotage on a mission from Claudius to thrust upon him his unwelcome presence from anxiety to pry into his affairs, and snatch a sacred secret from his inmost heart. Pitiless, therefore, is Hamlet's onslaught. With no attempt to conceal his aversion for the favorite minister of

the criminal usurper, he taunts and humiliates him; he worries and dumbfounds him; he dubs him a fish-monger, angling for his secret,—a fishmonger of slanderous talk and wearisome loquacity; he charges him with dishonesty, insinuates a shameful aspersion of his character, and ironically approves the immuring of his daughter. “Let her not walk in the sun; She is in danger of seduction; friend, look to it!” Let her not bask in the sunshine of princely favors, nor associate with those possessed of good and virtuous principles.

From the charge of dishonesty which Hamlet makes against Polonius, he proceeds to generalization, in which he employs the metaphor of the sun, “the god kissing carrion.” Though this clause be commonly found obscure, Warburton’s comment upon it seems the most acceptable. “This strange passage,” he says, “seems to contain as great and sublime a reflection as any the Poet puts in the mouth of his hero throughout the whole Play.” From the illative conjunction *for*, we learn that Hamlet is reasoning from what he had said to Polonius a few moments before, “To be honest as this world goes, is to be one picked out of ten thousand.” This utterance leads him by a chain of ideas to reflect upon the argument which libertines bring against Divine Providence from the circumstance of abounding evil. By his next words he, therefore, endeavors to answer that objection, and to vindicate Providence on the supposition that almost all men are wicked. He argues: *Why wonder at this abounding evil? The Sun breeds maggots in a dead dog; for the sun, though a god, sheds its heat and influence upon carrion.*

Here Hamlet stops short in his reasoning, lest, talking too logically, he might lead Polonius to suspect his madness to be feigned, and so he suddenly turns him off from the subject by a question concerning his daughter. The inference which he intended to make was a very noble one and to this

purpose: if then it be true that the effect produced be in accordance with the nature of a thing operated upon, (which is carrion,) and not according to the cause operating (which is a god), why need we wonder that the supreme Cause of all things diffusing His blessings on mankind—which dead in original sin, is as it were carrion—man instead of a proper return of duty, should breed only corruption and vice.

This same thought occurs in *Measure for Measure*, though in slightly varied form, because applied to a different subject:

. “But it is I,
That lying by the violet in the sun,
Do as the carrion does, not as the flow’r
Corrupt with virtuous season.” (II. 2. 165.)

The fact that rays of the same sun produce strangely different effects upon the violet and the carrion, naturally recalls the philosophic principle as voiced by the Angelic Doctor, “Whatever is received, is received according to the nature of the recipient.”²³ Such then is the argument at length, and it is as noble a one in behalf of Divine Providence as could come from the schools of divinity. The sentiment too is altogether in harmony with Hamlet’s character, for he is perpetually moralizing along the line of Christian principles; and his reflections naturally arise from his circumstances.

Totally bewildered by Hamlet’s enigmatic words, Polonius gladly turns to the first ray of light, which comes at the allusion to his daughter. In it, he sees further proof of his theory, and adds new humor to the scene, when, by an aside, he takes the audience into his confidence, and grows reminiscent of his own younger days:

²³ “Quidquid recipitur, secundum modum recipientis recipitur”.

“And when I was young, I was very idle,
And suffered much ecstasy in love, very near this.”
(1st. Quarto)

Feeling himself baffled and even worsted in the first attempt, he is urged by wounded vanity to fish again; but Hamlet, turning from his book to plague him with new stings in the guise of the “satirical rogue,” whose work he is supposed to be reading, accuses him of slander, and in running satire lampoons him as an old dotard with “a pitiful lack of wit,” and as usual closes the sally with a phrase which will appear foolish to Polonius: “You yourself, sir, should be as old as I am, if, like a crab, you could go backward.” Smarting under the lash of satire, and puzzled at Hamlet’s apparent method and his apt replies, the old minister explains them to his own satisfaction by the reflection that madmen are known at times to utter perchance the wisest words of wisdom.

Hamlet’s iteration at the leave-taking of Polonius is evidently employed for the purpose of encouraging belief in his insanity; such iteration is acknowledged as one of the marks of mental derangement, and is never adopted by Hamlet, save when conversing with distrusted persons. It is an ironical iteration most profoundly pathetic, a triple wail, which, revealing his utter weariness of life, wins our sympathy, and causes us to realize the slightness of the pain inflicted on the “tedious old fool” in comparison with the torture he himself is suffering in mind and heart.

IN PRISON

Polonius hastily retiring in a feeling of discomfiture, runs against Rosencrantz and Guildenstern as they enter the lobby. Officially informing them of the purpose of their coming, he points back to Hamlet, while exclaiming “there

he is," and then hastens away chuckling at the thought of the fate awaiting them. The Prince had not seen the two for many a day, and receives them graciously, and even greets them warmly, as his excellent friends—"The good lads" who are neither the button on Fortune's cap, nor the soles of her shoes. The two are perfect counterparts, and offer much amusement, for the one usually echoes the idea of the other. The only news they bring is the rumor "that the world has grown honest." The statement startles Hamlet. He is sure of the contrary. If it be honest now, what bad fortune has sent them to prison? To him the world with its many confines, wards, and dungeon is a prison, and of all, the worst is Denmark.

The expression reveals his inmost feelings. During his father's reign virtue ruled at court, and life seemed full of joy and sunshine; but all was changed when evil had enthroned itself at Elsinore. The court was Hamlet's narrow world, which he confounded with the outer world of Denmark. Hence, when by the ghostly revelation he became conscious of the fact that his paradise of joy and bliss was invaded by a hateful criminal, and befouled by gross moral evils, his much "thinking" upon these secret and appalling crimes, made Denmark seem to him a loathsome prison; "for there is nothing good or bad, but thinking makes it so."

This dictum of Hamlet, when quoted apart from the text which explains its meaning, easily lends itself to misinterpretation, and is in fact sometimes applied in a sense utterly at variance with what the Prince had in mind.²⁴ His words are especially pleasing to Rationalists and other non-Christian men whose theories expel the Creator from His

²⁴ A similar maxim, "To the clean all things are clean", (Titus, 1, 15), is no less often sophistically invoked by the purient and lascivious to mask or excuse their evil disposition.

own universe and annul His moral law.²⁵ Unwilling to admit the existence of God and religion, and the consequent moral obligations, they are driven to invent some ethical code which, independently of a Supreme Being, will meet the exigencies of social life. They hold that there is no radical difference between good and bad, between vice and virtue; and that the distinction commonly assumed is purely conventional and dependent upon the human will. Hence, as the basis of their ethics, some invoke public opinion, others, civil legislation; some, private or public utility, and others dream similar vain dreams.

Though these dreamers claim Hamlet as a con-disciple, by reason of his saying: "There is nothing good or bad, but thinking makes it so," their claim is far from legitimate. His dictum, if assumed as an ethical principle, must in justice be interpreted in harmony with the moral principles which Shakespeare and his hero both professed. Neither the one nor the other admitted the dreams of our modern theorists, but, on the contrary, held emphatically a radical distinction between vice and virtue, and between actions good and bad; and this distinction did not depend on man's free will, which is mutable, whereas the moral principles of the Poet and his hero are the immutable truths of Christianity.

A TWOFOLD NORM

Shakespeare's philosopher acknowledges a twofold norm of human actions, the one remote and the other proximate; the latter is internal and subjective, and is called conscience, the former is external and objective, and is called the natural

²⁵ "Man as considered by positivists and pantheists, is supreme and absolutely independent. There is no ruler above him who controls him by laws, no deity distinct from the universe, no omniscient and infinitely just being that holds him responsible for his actions. He is distinct from the brute, not in kind, but in degree only". — "Data of Modern Ethics Examined", John J. Ming, S. J., p. 26.

law, which is nothing more than a reflex of the eternal law of God. This eternal law is the supreme ordination laid down by God's wisdom, according to which He directs all creatures rational and irrational to their respective ends. Everything in the world is, in consequence, subject to this eternal law. It is stamped on the material world by the so-called laws of nature; it is impressed on the animal world in the various instincts by which animals are governed, and whose promptings they blindly follow; and it radiates in the soul of man by means of the first principles of the natural law, which are proposed to him for the guidance of his will.¹

These are fundamental principles of Christian morality. But Hamlet's words, if considered as a moral maxim, are in violent opposition. Such opposition cannot, therefore, be admitted save on the ground that, as a Christian, he either fell unwittingly into an open contradiction of the most vital principle of Christian ethics, or was wholly ignorant of the most fundamental moral truth, taught by the religion he professed. The former supposition is too extravagant and even incredible in a man of Hamlet's intellectual attainments

¹ The natural law is a participation of the eternal law, communicated to man by the light of reason, and contains all precepts which arise from the necessary relation between God and man, and between men themselves. Reason is not this natural law, but only manifests it to us. Reason, moreover, does not oblige us, but merely shows us the obligation. All this is affirmed by the testimony of reason, of conscience, and the universal consent of mankind. They proclaim that man recognizes and understands, as laws binding by nature, a certain number of moral principles which, emanating from the eternal law, are naturally known and assented to by the human mind, and according to which, reason, on the one hand, distinguishes between good and evil, and conscience, on the other, commands or forbids certain actions according as they are in harmony or in discord with those principles.

Reason, moreover, guided by these principles, judges that certain actions are by their nature intrinsically good, and others intrinsically bad; and that this distinction, because radical and intrinsic to the very nature of the action, can never be obliterated either on the part of man or on the part of God; for as God cannot effect that two and two make five, so neither can He effect that an act intrinsically evil become good, and vice versa. He cannot, therefore, cause religion, justice, and temperance to become vices; and impiety, injustice, and intemperance to become virtues. Hence the distinction between good and evil does not depend on free will, but, arising from the very nature of the moral act itself, remains forever permanent. Right must be right, and wrong must be wrong, as long as God is God.

and moral culture; the latter is negated by superabundant proofs in the drama itself. If accepting the moral law of God, as emphasized in the decalogue when he said: "O, that the Everlasting had not fixed His canon against self-slaughter," Hamlet proved himself a Christian who knew that, howsoever much he desired death, no amount of thinking could make evil good, or justify a suicidal act; if he battled conscientiously throughout the drama for the right against the wrong, faithful, in a continuous conflict, to the injunction of his ghostly father, "taint not thy soul"; if he harkened to a voice which his much thinking could not stifle—the voice of conscience—which distinguishing good from evil, enjoins the one and forbids the other; it was all, because he accepted the Christian code of morals, and recognized the natural law of God, which dictates that moral good is differentiated from moral evil so radically and intrinsically, and so independently of human will and thought, that rational creatures neither individually nor collectively, can under any circumstance or for any purpose make good evil, and evil good.

Gervinus, a Positivist, nevertheless, writes on the words of Hamlet: "Virtue and vice and good and bad actions acquire their real importance from the circumstances, aims, and natural character of the men, that it is not the *What* but the *How* that decides the value of an action." These words show how loose are the views of non-Christian commentators when touching on the moral character of a Christian Hamlet. Contrary to Gervinus, every Christian holds that the what, or the thing done, though it may be modified by aims and circumstances, is, nevertheless, the great primal factor in determining the goodness or the badness of a moral act. If the what, or the thing done be in itself bad, as is injustice or impiety, no intention or circumstance

can justify it, or make it morally good. Every Christian, therefore, maintains, Gervinus notwithstanding, that willful murder can never be made an action morally good by reason of "the circumstances, or aims, or character of the man" who perpetrates the crime.

The unbeliever who would wish to read into Hamlet's words a moral and anti-Christian maxim, must face an overpowering opposition, which confronts him at every point of the primal action of the drama. Hamlet's words, in consequence, must have another meaning, which is in harmony with his pronounced Christian principles. What that meaning is, becomes evident, if his words be read, not apart, but in connection with the text. When the young courtiers affirm that they do not think Denmark a prison, Hamlet to the contrary thinks it is; and these contradictory opinions he assigns, not to the object of thought, but to the person whose subjective thinking is affected by his mental condition of joy or sorrow. These conditions differed in Hamlet and his young friends; to the latter, Denmark was still the same, but to the former, it seemed a prison, because his mental vision was now colored by his secret knowledge, and a consequent grief of mind and heart. Once, like them he thought his native land the brightest spot on earth, but now under changed conditions, when his mind is troubled by affliction, all things seem tinged with darker hues and colors. Of this he himself complains: "I have of late lost all my mirth,—earth seems to me a sterile promontory,"—and the sky "a pestilential congregation of vapors."

"All seem infected that the infected spy;
As all looks yellow to the jaundiced eye."

It is clear that Hamlet's mind and heart were infected by his griefs and sufferings, and that, from much "*thinking*,"

and reflecting, and brooding over them, he fell into a deep and troubled melancholy, which changed him from a happy optimist into a most confirmed pessimist. Hence, formerly, when under favorable conditions, his life was pleasant, he thought Denmark a palace; but now, when under adverse circumstances his life is miserable, he thinks the same Denmark is a prison. Therefore, it appears evident that, far from uttering any moral maxim either in the abstract or in the concrete, he only wishes to express his own subjective mood of mind and feelings after passing from joyous sunshine into a seeming hopeless gloom of adversity.

KING AND BEGGAR

At court the belief was common that "Hamlet's transformation" was chiefly due to his failure of succession to the throne. When, therefore, Rosencrantz adopting this opinion, ascribes his melancholy to disappointed ambition, he replies in terms that exhibit his philosophic temperament: though bodily imprisoned in the narrowest cell, he would still, free of spirit, be king of unconfined space to roam in fancy over earth and sea. To a philosopher

"Stone walls do not a prison make, nor iron bars a cage;
Minds innocent and quiet take that for a hermitage."

If Denmark seem a prison, it is no hermitage; for though innocent of soul, Hamlet is troubled night and day by disquieting dreams, dreams of his abhorrent life at court, where he must mingle in the company of the foul murderer, and seemingly condone the disgraceful conduct of his mother; dreams of the bloody task to which he has solemnly sworn to devote his life, and which seems to grow the more hopeless, the more he contemplates it.

Ignorant of the nature of his troubled dreams, and ac-

cepting the common belief concerning the cause of his melancholy, his companions insist that ambition is a shadow and even a shadow's shadow. He refutes the supposition from their own words by a paradox which appears unintelligible to them. Making a comparison between shadow and substance, which are correlated terms, he assumes a like contrast to exist between king and beggar. From this idea of contrast, he reasons that, if lofty aims of ambition be nothing more than shadows which are cast only by bodies or substances, it follows that, if the inflated ambition of a king be but a shadow, that shadow must be cast by a beggar; since king and beggar are in like contrast with shadow and its substance. Hence, he concludes that a king is but a beggar's shadow, and, if this be so, why then, he asks, should his troubled dreams concern the loss of the crown. He curtly cuts short further parley by inviting the young courtiers to accompany him to court.

A SECRET MISSION

As soon as Hamlet began to play the madman, all eyes at court from the King to the lowest menial were upon him, some officially and some from curiosity. Claudius, prodded by a guilty conscience, had from caution commissioned trusted minions to attend on him and watch his every movement. Hamlet, however, from ignorance of the royal summons of the two courtiers and the secret purpose of their visit, had received them graciously, and even given them a hearty welcome; but their unusual offer to join his retinue, immediately aroused his suspicion, and with impassioned words he declined their unsolicited proposal, complaining that he is already most dreadfully attended.

Acting on suspicion, he at once throws away all cere-

mony and, in the name of friendship, demands what brings them to Elsinore. He meets their flattering and equivocal reply by proffering them his poor thanks, which, because sincere, he deems too dear by far for their visit of suspected sincerity. Irritated by their evasions and their shufflings, he suddenly changes his manner, and, watching their every move and look, harries them with question upon question with an eager and terrible directness which allows no subterfuge. Under the fierce attack, the youths who are unskilled in the artifice of cunning and diplomacy, are confused and, betraying by guilty looks and nervous action the secret of their visit, are in fine, earnestly conjured by the memory of their former love and continued friendship to speak out the truth, and openly admit that the "good King and Queen have sent for them."

Satisfied with their admission of being emissaries of Claudius, Hamlet saves them from betraying the royal secret; for he himself forestalls them in the declaration of the purpose of their visit. He proceeds to explain his "transformation," by exposing his present miserable condition. Having lost of late his usual mirth and joyous spirits, he has abandoned all customary exercise, and, indeed, so thick is his mental gloom, and so leaden his heart that the earth itself seems but a sterile promontory, and its excellent canopy, the overhanging firmament with its majestic roof, fretted with fiery orbs, appears to be filled with foul and pestilential vapors. The cause of this apparent change of earth and sky, as well as of his own heart-sickness and melancholy, Hamlet conceals from his young friends by a mental reservation.

HOW LIKE AN ANGEL

After the description of his "transformation," Hamlet prevents any questioning concerning its cause by passing in

a sudden though natural transition to the consideration of man, not indeed as he exists about him, but according to the abstract notion in which, as a philosopher, he was wont to conceive and contemplate him. In this idea, man by nature is not contaminated nor degraded to the level of the brute creation, but a rational being free from blurs and blotches, and endowed with perfections which exalt him to fellowship with angels, and ennoble him to the sonship of God. In a word, he contemplates the nature of man still untainted by sin, as it was on that first morn of life, when coming forth fresh and beautiful from the hand of the Creator. In wonder he exclaims, "What a piece of work is man!" He is truly the master-piece of our visible creation. Of him a later poet sings:

"Since God collected and resumed in man,
The firmaments, the strata and the light
Fish, fowl, and beast and insect — all their trains
Of various life caught back upon his arm,
Reorganized and constituted man,
The microcosm, the adding up of works."

But Hamlet, a greater philosopher than Browning, beheld in man a greater microcosm, or epitome of all God's works; for the individual man, consisting of a distinct dual nature, the one a material body, and the other a spiritual soul, touches by the former on the animal creation, and by the latter on the angelic nature; and therefore unites in himself, not only the material and the visible, but also the spiritual and invisible world. The nobility of this microcosm, Hamlet admires in its intellectual soul, of which the royal prophet says: "The light of Thy countenance, O Lord, is signed upon us." (Ps. 4, 7.) Its nobility is known from operations which, being immaterial and spiritual, clearly indicate their principle or cause. He, moreover, admires the

soul's intellectual faculty in its "infinity" of a twofold scope: spiritual by nature and, in consequence, unlimited by matter, it wanders beyond our material world, and, independent of space and time, soars to universal truths and the contemplation of things which, being of the invisible and immaterial order, lie beyond the horizon of mortal eye; "infinite" again, he affirms, is the soul's intellectual "faculty," by reason of its object which is truth, all truth, even infinite truth, which is God Himself, with the sole proviso that it be properly proposed.

This thought of man's intellectual action leads Hamlet to compare him to angels, and well he may with the warrant of Holy Writ: "Thou hast made him a little less than the angels."²⁶ Of man he says, "in action how like an angel!" Actions of angels are, however, immaterial, because being without bodies, they are purely spiritual substances, which, endowed with intellect and free will, act independently of matter. Like angels, man by the spiritual faculty of his soul can rise above material things; like angels he can contemplate higher truths of the invisible and spiritual world; like angels he can by his spiritual faculty of free will spurn the material, perishable things of earth in his aspiration after the nobler, spiritual, and eternal good.

If man be "in action like an angel," Hamlet affirms him to be, moreover, "in apprehension like a god." Apprehension is properly an act of the intellectual faculty of the soul, which in its nature is spiritual like God. "Ye are Gods, and all of you the sons of the Most High,"²⁷ has been said of man, because "God created them according to His image."²⁸ This image is man's soul, which by its threefold operation mirrors the unity of the Godhead in its Trinity of persons. If this

²⁶ Ps. 8, 6. — Heb. 2, 7.

²⁷ Ps. 81, 6. — Jno. 10, 34.

²⁸ Gen. I, 27.

image, the human soul, be by nature spiritual with no material elements; if it be simple with no component parts, and in consequence indestructible, or immortal; and if by its intellect it be inclined to all truth, and by its will determined to all good: it is because it reflects in some degree the infinite perfections of its uncreated Original. Well may Hamlet, therefore, call man "The beauty of the world." Beauty is perfection, and in man's dual nature culminate perfections, which make him King of our earthly palace, wherein by his rational powers he rules, "the paragon of animals." "Thou hast crowned him with glory and honor, and hast set him over the works of thy hands."²⁹

A CONTRAST

Hamlet's exaltation of man, "in action like an angel and in apprehension like a god," strongly suggests its sorry contrast which is offered us by certain modern theorists who would degrade him from the dignity of a god to the base level of a more or less developed brute. Such iconoclasts will exist in every age, and, strange to say, will like ungrateful sons, labor to destroy that religion which by giving them a Christian civilization, has saved them from being born savages of a reverted barbarism. Of such the Wise man said of old, "The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God,"³⁰ in his heart, because he willed it, and, therefore, the wish was father to the thought. Hence, the Lord abandons them to their evil will: "So I let them go according to the desires of their hearts, they shall walk in their own inventions."³¹ Of this same Scriptural fool, Lord Bacon makes the shrewd

²⁹ Ps. VIII, 6. — Heb. II, 7.

³⁰ Ps. XIII, 1.

³¹ Ps. LXXX, 13.

remark: "Deum non esse non credit, nisi cui Deum non esse expedit."³²

Though as already noted, Shakespeare was far in advance of his age, he does not seem to have grown to that degree of development which is required to class him with our modern innovators: he stands with vehemence for the nobler man against the descendants of the ape. If with us today, the Poet would scarce align his Hamlet, the philosopher, with the unthinking many who, feeding on novelty and sensationalism, out-Darwin Darwin, and in strange simplicity accept as facts what are only suppositions and unproven theories.³³ "It is not science, but the deceptive pretence of science, which is responsible for most of the ideas popularly entertained concerning Darwinism. They are sedulously propagated by Rationalistic Press Associations, by reason of the obvious fact that the mass of men have an inexhaustible capacity for swallowing assertions, however groundless, if only they are sensational and graphic."³⁴ Against Darwinism in the nineteenth century have arisen many scientific luminaries of the first magnitude. Of its present status, Von Hartmann writes:

"In the eighties, Darwin's influence was at its height, and exercised almost absolute control over technical research. In the nineties, for the first time, a few timid expressions of doubt and opposition were heard, and these gradually swelled into a great chorus of voices, aiming at

³² "A man believes God's non-existence only when God's non-existence is expedient for him".

³³ Professor Fleischmann of Erlangen in his work on Darwinism declares that "The theory has not a single fact to confirm it in the realm of nature. It is not the result of scientific research, but purely the product of the imagination".

Professor Driesch in a recent Gifford lecture affirms:

"We do not know very much about evolution at all, — in this field we are just at the very beginning of what deserves the name of exact knowledge; while Darwinism fails all along the line". — "Science and Philosophy of Organism", p. 269.

³⁴ "Man or Monkey", Month, Vol. 113. p. 373.

the overthrow of the Darwinian theory. In the first decade of the twentieth century it has become apparent that the days of Darwinism are numbered. Among its latest opponents are such savants, as Eimer, Gustav Wolf, De Vries, Hooke, von Wellstein, Fleischmann, Reinke, and many others." Cf. *von Hartman—The Passing of Darwinism*.

Hamlet, the philosopher, must be classed with these sane minds of our day, who, in their ability to distinguish facts from mere suppositions, do not lose the substance by grasping at its shadow. Like them he saw that from the earliest times, man's nature revealed no human progress in the real sense of the word.³⁵ What is progress, asks Mr. Bryce in an Address at Harvard:

"It does not seem possible, if we go back to the earliest eastern Europe, to say the creative powers of the human mind in such subjects as poetry, philosophy, and historical narrative or portraiture have either improved or deteriorated. The poetry of the early Hebrews and of the early Greeks has never been surpassed and hardly ever equaled. Neither has the philosophy of Plato and Aristotle, and the speeches of Cicero and Demosthenes. Geniuses like Dante, Chaucer and Shakespeare appear without our being able to account for them, and for aught we know, another may occur at any moment." *Atlantic Monthly*, Aug. 1907.

From the contemplation of man in his high nobility of nature, Hamlet turns naturally to compare him mentally with men of real life, as he observes them at court. "This

³⁵ Professor Petrie, the highest authority on Egyptology from 2000 to 5000 years before Christ, writes:

"We have now before us a view of man at the earliest point to which we can trace written history, and what strikes us most is how very little his nature and his abilities have changed in seven thousand years; what he admired, we admire; what were his limits in fine handiwork also are ours. We have a wider outlook, a greater understanding of things; our interests may have extended in that interval, but so far as human nature and tastes go, man is essentially unchanged in this interval. This is the practical outlook, and it must teach us how little material civilization is likely in the future to change the nature, the weaknesses or the abilities of our ancestors in ages yet to come." — "Romance of Early Civilization", *The Independent*, Jan. 7, 1909.

quintessence of dust," though informed and ennobled by a spiritual soul, he finds to be defiled by ignoble traits and base human passions. The realistic view affects him with sadness and painful depression. His faith in mankind is shaken by his uncle's treachery and crimes; and his mother's shocking frailty and shamelessness undermine his confidence in womankind. Faint at heart and sick of soul, he moves alone amid a motly court, burdened with a secret which he may not speak, and feels himself a solitary, the one lone prisoner in some wild and desert waste. If from their preconceived notion, his apparent misanthropy seems to his young friends a proof of his mental malady, it will make their efforts fruitless, and so serve his purpose well.

THE INHIBITION

The announcement that the Players are on their way to Elsinore at once awakens Hamlet from his melancholy, and turns his thoughts from the subjective to the objective world. Rejoicing at the news, he sees on the instant an opportunity for furthering his secret project. They are, he finds, the same tragedians in whom he took so much delight, when he and his young friends had attended their plays in the city. But he wonders why they travel in the provinces, since performances in the City would be better for their reputation and profit. Their journey through country towns was, however, enforced by an "inhibition" which was caused by the "late innovation." The latter term may possibly refer to the new practice of treating polemically upon the stage matters both political and religious, or to attacks upon "the new morals" of the Puritan party, or to the novelty of the choir boys of St. Paul and the Chapel Royal playing in the public theaters.

But there is another and more probable reason.³⁶ As the "innovation" is affirmed to be the cause of the "inhibition," it must be explained in relation to the same. Inhibition was a technical term employed by the Privy Council, when prohibiting any Play or the performance of a particular troupe. The company of Shakespeare had fallen under the displeasure of the government in 1601, owing to the share it had taken in the "innovation," or conspiracy of Essex and Southampton, the Poet's patrons.³⁷ In consequence, they left the City and, travelling through the provinces, are known to have played at Aberdeen, at Cambridge, at Oxford, and other cities of the kingdom.

Strange to say, the reason which Shakespeare assigns for the travelling of Hamlet's favorite tragedians, is wholly different in each of the three versions of the play. In the First Quarto (1603), the sole cause given is the popular favor accorded to a rival company of children; in the Second Quarto (1604), a new cause is alleged, which, as already noted, was the "inhibition" due to the "innovation." But in the First Folio (1623), both causes are given in explanation of the travelling of the company. As on this point our modern text, is but a verbatim copy of this First Folio, we need, for the sake of comparison, only give the text of the First and Second Quartos.

First Quarto. (1603.)

Ham. How comes it that they travel? Do they grow rusty?

Gil. No, my lord, their reputation holds as it was wont.

Ham. How then?

Gil. In faith, my lord novelty carries it away,
For the principal public audience that
Came to them, are turned to private plays,
And to the humor of children.

³⁶ Cf. Fleay's "Chronicle History of the London Stage".

³⁷ "Vide", Part 1. C. 1.

Second Quarto. (1604.)

Ham. How chances it they travel? Their residence both in reputation, and profit was better both ways.

Ros. I think their inhibition, comes by means of the late innovation.

Ham. Do they hold the estimation they did when I was in the City; are they so followed?

Ros. No indeed they are not.

In explanation of these variant texts, it may be noted that Shakespeare's company first performed Hamlet in the tour of the provinces in 1601, and continued its enactment on returning to London in 1602. It is natural to suppose, since Elizabeth was still reigning, that the company, acting either in the provinces or in the City, deemed it prudent to avoid all allusions in the play to the disgrace into which they had fallen; hence, the piratical copy of the drama, which was printed in 1603, contains no mention of the "inhibition" due to the "late innovation." In that same year the Queen died, and Shakespeare's company came under the direct patronage of James the First. But meanwhile, the Poet had revised the play as we have it in the edition of 1604, and caution being no longer necessary, he assigned the real cause of his company's enforced travel in the provinces to an "inhibition" by reason of the "late innovation." When, however, after Shakespeare's death, the play was again printed in 1623, the passage was found to have been elaborated so as to contain the allusion of the First as well as of the Second Quarto, and this version is followed in our modern text.

THEATRICAL RIVALRY

The Poet immediately proceeds by a short digression to give us a sketch of the theatrical rivalry then existing between adult and boy actors on the stage. It had been long

customary before Shakespeare's day for choir boys to give occasional performances in public, and in fact recruits for the common theatre were often found among them, especially for women's parts at a time when females were not allowed to play upon the public stage. At this period, the choir boys notably of Chapel Royal, St. Paul, and Westminster schools, had attained preëminence, and won the favor of the public. Soon organized into regular companies, they invaded the theatres in competition with adult actors. A keen strife resulted, in which the public responded with enthusiasm to the efforts of the boy-players. With them arose, according to Heywood, the practice of attacking customs, laws, and public and private characters, as well as of ridiculing the more famous adult actors.

At the Blackfriars Theatre, the Chapel children enacted Jonson's satirical dramas, in which he lampooned most of his rival dramatists. In general, those who wrote plays for children presumed themselves to be shielded by the youthfulness of the players in their sallies of satire and invective. For this reason Shakespeare glanced reprehensively upon the pertness of these unfledged nestlings, who certainly would grow up into "common players." Furthermore, he was himself a sufferer in his theatre; these Chapel players, as Rosencrantz affirms, had by force of popular favor carried away for the time even "Hercules and his load," that is to say Shakespeare's own Globe Theatre, the sign of which was Hercules carrying the globe.

From the present instance of the fickleness of popular favor, Hamlet, preoccupied of mind, turns to another example in the case of Claudius. Many who a few months before in ridicule made faces at him, now purchase his miniature at great price. Affected with disgust at the thought, he exclaims: "S'blood, there is something in this more than

natural, if philosophy could find it out.” His utterance of the term “S’blood,” as an abbreviation of the Sacred blood (of Christ) in reference to the Holy Eucharist, was often used in solemn affirmation.

At a flourish of trumpets, which announces the arrival of the travelling company, Hamlet, from fear lest the courtiers would notice that his greeting to the players was more hearty than their own, hurriedly gives them a more gracious welcome than his coldness of suspicion at first allowed. He assures them, moreover, by allusion to their errand, that when opportunity serves his purpose he can distinguish a hawk from a handsaw. In this expression common to hawkers, handsaw is a corruption of hernsaw or heron, and Hamlet supposes what falconry affirms, that birds fly with the wind. If this be so, it follows that the wind being from the north-north-west, the bird will fly to the south, and, in consequence, the hunter facing the south, and dazzled by the rays of the sun, will find it difficult to distinguish his falcon from the heron; but when the wind is from the south, the sportsman with his back to the sun, can with undazzled eye readily distinguish the birds. Thus Hamlet amid adverse winds or circumstances may seem blinded in reason, but with favorable winds or opportunities, his uncle-father and aunt-mother will see that he has his right senses.

TOYING WITH POLONIUS

The next moment Hamlet observes the old chancellor shuffling forward in haste, and, having called the attention of the courtiers, says in an undertone: “Look! that great baby you see coming is not yet out of his swaddling clouts.” After prophesying the nature of his errand, he begins in the presence of Polonius to address his young friends with earnest but irrelevant words so as to blind him to the fact that they had been

speaking of him. Noticing the old man's anxiety to communicate the news, he roguishly forestalls him by speaking of Roscius, a famous Roman actor. Polonius at once blurts out that the actors have come, at which the Prince exclaims "buz, buz!" an interjection often used against loquacious bores who were given to common places and trite tales. "The expression," says Blackstone, "was used at Oxford when any one began a story that was generally known before."

The old man on the supposition of Hamlet's malady, ignores his sarcastic retort, and proceeds to bepraise the actors as the best in the world for all kinds of Plays, and pedantically enumerates the many divisions and subdivisions of the drama, as found in the license given to the King's Company in 1603. But unsatisfied with these divisions, Polonius with vain display adds others of his own: as, "scenes individable or unlimited" according as they observed the Unity of Place or not; plays of "writ or of liberty," that is classic or romantic dramas, whether written or improvised. For all of them these actors are the only players. With Seneca and with Plautus they are equally at home; the former excelled in tragedy as the latter did in comedy, and both in Shakespeare's time were the fashionable models for every playwright. With ironical admiration of the chancellor's literary judgment, Hamlet exclaims:

"O Jephthah,³⁸ judge of Israel, what a treasure hadst thou!"

³⁸ Jephte was a warrior of Galaad. Having been chosen to conduct a campaign against the Ammonites, "the spirit of the Lord came upon him. He made a vow to the Lord saying: If thou wilt deliver the children of Ammon into my hands, whosoever shall first come forth out of the doors of my house, and shall meet me when I return in peace from the children of Ammon, the same will I offer a holocaust to the Lord". On his triumphant return to his home in Mispha the first person to meet him was his only daughter. The common opinion is that Jephte immolated his daughter in fulfilment of his vow; but according to another opinion his vow was kept by the daughter being consecrated to a life of virginity. This seems plausible from the verse (Judges) XI, 37, where she asks for two months in which to bewail her virginity; and by verse 39, where we are told that according to his vow, she knew no man, which was in consonance with a statute in Israel.

Polonius is bewildered for the moment. The treasure is his daughter whom, like Jephthah, he would sacrifice. The words quoted are from a popular ballad current at the time. The first stanza runs as follows:

“I have read that many years ago,
When Jephthah, judge of Israel,
Had one fair daughter and no more,
Whom he loved passing well;
As by lot, God wot,
It came to pass, most like it was,
Great wars there should be,
And who should be the chief but he, but he.”

By this quizzical allusion to the daughter, Hamlet confirms Polonius in his pet theory, and, continuing to play with the old diplomat, further puzzles him by equivocal expressions, and seeing him all amazed, suddenly cuts off the dialogue, and turns to welcome the approaching Players.

TESTING THE PLAYERS

The hero is portrayed throughout the drama as a man of uncommon mind, enriched with more than ordinary literary attainments; but for the exaltation of the Poet's own avocation, he is pictured in the present instance, not only as a lover and patron of the theater, but even as a master of the dramatic art. Hamlet, therefore, welcomes the Players with a gracious warmth that indicates his good will and pleasure, treats them with a familiarity common among old friends, and addresses each one personally with a gayety and wit that is prompted either by his appearance or some known characteristic.

They are now more than ever welcome; by their presence, he hopes to find some distraction from his gloomy thoughts, a glad relief from his oppressive melancholy, and above all, a furtherance of his secret design to discover the guilt of Claudius by their art. Overmastered by this purpose, he instantly

with the ardor of a "French falconer" challenges the chief Player for "a passionate speech." To test his tragical ability he calls for a play which he once saw them perform. It was "caviare" to the general public, because neither understood nor relished by the groundlings, but to the cultured it was very entertaining; for characterized as it was by propriety, order, and proportion, and free from irrelevancies and affectations, each scene was carefully elaborated to advance the plot. Of this play, one speech, the tale of Aeneas³⁹ to Dido, was especially pleasing to Hamlet, and, at his prompting, the First Player declaims it with good effect.

The speech has given rise to much discussion. Some consider it a mere burlesque, or satire upon "university and court wit and scholar with his 'laws and writ' and his unities and classic models;" but it seems obvious that Shakespeare was obliged to write the actor's speech in a totally different style from that of his own Play, in order that one might be distinguished from the other. Moreover, the speech should have the characteristics of Plays which were current in Hamlet's day, long before the drama had reached its Shakespearean perfection. Such dramas, partaking much of the nature of the epic, were often replete with highly poetical declamations, which were couched in the lyric vehemence and pomp of heroic verse.

POLONIUS A CRITIC

Polonius, little interested in the passionate speech, is heedless of the forcible imagery of the pathetic tale, and at

³⁹ Aeneas was the reputed founder of the Roman nation. Wandering over the Mediterranean after the fall of Troy, he touched at Carthage, where entertained by Queen Dido, he narrated the destruction of the ill-fated city; how the Greeks unable to capture it by assault, had cunningly constructed a wooden horse in which they concealed a troop of armed men. When the Trojans had dragged it within their walls as a trophy of their triumph the Greeks came forth at night from their hiding place, and laid waste the city by fire and sword. Pyrrhus slew king Priam, but Hecuba, the queen was carried off a slave. Aeneas bearing his father Anchises on his shoulders, escaped unnoticed from the flames.

its finest part interrupts the player by exclaiming, "this is too long!" Though presuming to be a good literary critic, he unconsciously betrays his bad taste and aligns himself with the groundlings against Hamlet, who a moment before had praised the same play so highly. The Prince in instant defense of the actor, turns upon the doting critic: he should go to the barber with his too long beard; the speech is beyond his comprehension, and therefore makes him drowsy; what will he have, a jig or a bawdry doggerel suitable to "groundlings?" A jig was in the Poet's day a humorous performance given after the fall of the curtain, and consisted of coarse ludicrous dialogue with music and dancing, much perhaps after the fashion of our modern "Music Halls." Such scornful taunts enforce silence on Polonius; but conscious of his blunder and anxious to maintain his reputation as a literary critic against such a public assault, he greedily grasps the first opportunity to interpolate another but unfortunate criticism. It is on the word "mobled," or muffled, which Hamlet, in likelihood to tempt him, takes up and repeats with emphasis, and the dotard at once gleefully approves it as highly dignified and appropriate.

Dismissing the Players, the Prince commends them to the care of Polonius, and is solicitous that he treat them well. In praise of the dramatic art he calls the actors the "abstracts and chroniclors of time;" for the purpose of the drama is to present by a brief but intensive form a view of great historic characters and note-worthy events. In the Poet's day, before the advent of the modern novel and newspaper, the theatre possessed much of their influence, dealt largely with satire, and held up public men of fame or notoriety to commendation or ridicule. Hence, Hamlet infers that it is worse for Polonius to have their ill-repute during life, than a bad epitaph after death. When to his command, to use the players well, the

chancellor flippantly replies: "I will use them according to their desert," the Prince considers the remark a slight upon his guests, and, in consequence, administers a sharp rebuke, exclaiming: "God's bodykins. The less they deserve the more is the merit of your bounty," and insinuates that if every man had his due, Polonius himself would not escape a whipping. The exclamation, God's body or bodykins, which is a diminutive of body, signifies the small sacred wafer of the Holy Eucharist.

After the exit of Polonius and all the actors save the First, Hamlet engages him to play before the court on the morrow night a tragedy known as *The Murder of Gonzago*, in which are to be inserted some twelve or sixteen lines of his own. The identity of these lines has always been a subject of controversy. They are found, some commentators think, in the Player-king's speech, beginning with the words, "I do not believe you think what now you speak;" because the passage is very philosophical and clearly marks Hamlet's characteristic turn of mind. Others maintain that this passage cannot be the one in question, since it does not harmonize with Hamlet's purpose, which was to introduce in the play the portrayal of an action parallel to the crime of Claudius. Such a portrayal is found only in the lines spoken by Lucianus; but he is unable to deliver the whole interpolated passage; for after the sixth line, while pouring the poison into the ear of the sleeping Player-King, he is interrupted by the commotion of the court, which is thrown into disorder by the sudden agitation and hasty retreat of the stricken Claudius.

In closing his private interview with the First Player, it occurs to Hamlet that these adepts of the mimic art, having witnessed with evident delight his repeated sallies of satire against Polonius, might presume to imitate him, and, therefore, with his usual delicacy of feeling, cautions him against

following his own example. His farewell words are those in common use among good Catholics, "God be with you," — words which in a modern and more materialistic age, have been corrupted into our "good bye."

IN MENTAL CONFLICT

"Now I am alone," exclaims Hamlet, rejoicing in freedom from the restraint which the presence of distrusted persons had imposed upon him. Far from enacting the madman in this and other soliloquies, he is recollected, full of introspection, and coherent thought, and if his words and feelings be impassioned, it is solely from the mental and moral pressure that burdens his soul. He reveals in sharp outlines the self-struggle which, beginning with his sworn resolve to avenge the murder, continues intermittingly throughout the drama. It is, however, more marked in his soliloquies in which, free from espionage, he can freely body forth his burning thoughts and emotions.

His present struggle arises from a conflict between his thirst for action and the enforced necessity of delay. It is a conflict between natural and Christian sentiments, between his lower and higher nature, a conflict in which the pagan, rebelling against the Christian, storms and rages, and charges him unduly with many faults and vices. The struggle is aroused and fanned to fierceness by thoughts which result from the comparison between the actor's passion and his own inertness. With no motive, save his mimic art, the Player in fictitious passion can with quavering voice and tearful eyes speak so movingly of Priam's death and the grief of Hecuba. But what is Hecuba to him, that he should weep for her?

"What would he do had he my loss?

His father murdered, a crown bereft him.

He would turn all his tears to drops of blood,

Amaze the standers by, by his laments,
Strike more than wonder in judicial ears,
Confound the ignorant and make mute the wise,
Indeed his passion would be general.”

(Original text of 1603.)

All this would Hamlet do with the freedom of the Player, but this freedom is denied him. In the present situation, he can act no play, nor betray the secret revelation, nor disclose his own conviction of his uncle's guilt, without making still more difficult the work of his “revenge.” With no proof of the murder, save the shadowy word of an invisible witness, he must lapse into an enforced inactivity, and at best work indirectly upon the supposed criminal by means of an image reflected by the Players. They are free to act where he by force of circumstances is constrained to look on in silent observation.

MAN AND SUPERMAN

To understand the conflict of Hamlet is to understand the nature of the opposing forces at work within him. In man is a dual or complex nature of soul and body, the one higher and the other lower, the one animal and the other rational, and

⁴⁰ Frederick Nietzsche (1844-1900), a German of the positivistic school, was strong in his dislike of Christianity. When the Darwinian theory was first announced, he found it convenient for the construction of a new system of ethics. Dividing mankind into two classes, he called the one *Übermensch*, or superman, and the other, “*Sklavenmensch*”, or serf. To the former belong all men of superior powers, who are capable of dominating others, and fitted to survive in an egoistic struggle for the mastery; to the latter belong the vulgar mass, or common herd of humanity. These two classes of “men” and “supermen” he subjects to different laws of ethics. To the man or serf, typical of the multitude, he assigns “*Sklavenmoral*”, or the laws of Christian morality, which are good enough for the masses and even necessary to keep them in subjection. But such laws do not bind the “Superman” who, as a superior being, a genius, a god, has no superior or master whatsoever, and therefore, free from obligation is privileged to follow his instincts and his passions without accountability or restraint. This strange system, seems a reflection of the pride and presumption of the pharisee who thanked God that he was not like other men. Such doctrines are less surprising when we learn that the unfortunate man was hopelessly stricken with insanity, which continued in violence till his death, eleven years later.

the union of these two opposing forces in the one personality affords a continuous source of struggle. These two warring elements may be well denominated *man* and *superman*, not indeed, be it noted, in the objectionable and unwarranted sense in which Nietzsche⁴⁰ used them, but in the true and original meaning as dictated by Christian philosophy and revelation.

In man's primordial fall was lost that harmony which once existed between his material and spiritual natures; and, as a consequence, arose a mutual antagonism, which incites to an intermittent war for the mastery. Between them there can be no reconciliation; for the flesh must ever be flesh and the spirit ever spirit. Hence, in the words of Sacred Scripture, "the life of man is a continual warfare;" no peace can be looked for till death tear apart the combatants.

The cause of this warfare is the insubordination of man's inferior or animal nature. Being corruptible, it is subject to blind instincts and irrational passions. These, though good in themselves, often lead to abuse, because they tend to their objects independently of man's higher nature, and often against right reason and the moral order. Of this nature, Holy Writ affirms, "man is inclined to evil from his youth." Man's principle of good is the higher or rational nature of the *superman*, which, being immaterial, incorruptible, and spiritual, and endowed with a nobler life and faculties, rises to higher purposes than those of the material instincts and passions of the animal. The *superman*, and not the *man*, is by the light of reason able to apprehend the natural law, to distinguish between good and evil, and to recognize his rational and moral obligation to embrace the one and to shun the other. As the master of his own household, the *Superman* should in all things reduce to subjection the *man* of the lower or rebellious nature, so that in harmony with the superman it may also

tend to the greater common good of the whole man. Such subordination may be seen exemplified in the life of a man who, uninfluenced by a supernatural religion, lives a mere natural life under the guidance of reason and the natural law.

Such a man, however, does not exhaust the meaning of the term *superman*, as we employ it. Between him and the Christian arises a difference which distinguishes the natural from the supernatural man. The natural *superman* lives wholly absorbed in the interests of the present life, and, because ignorant of the supernatural and indifferent to all things spiritual or supernal, is concerned with nothing beyond our visible creation. The Christian *superman*, on the contrary, is reborn by divine grace to a new and more exalted life, and illumined by heavenly revealed truths, rises, superior to transient and corruptible things, to a higher and spiritual world of existences, whose interests captivate his mind and heart, and urge him to nobler aspirations, hopes, and activities. The supernatural with all that it implies may be summed up in the word *religion*, which, says Carlyle, "is the soul of practice and the primary end of man's life." But in the pursuit of this higher life, the Christian *superman* finds himself in almost daily conflict with the *man* of the lower or merely natural life.

The Christian hero of the tragedy exemplifies this dual conflict. In the one, it is that of the *man* against the *superman*, or of the lower and animal nature against the higher and rational; and in the other, that of the natural against the supernatural man. If we bear this in mind, then the real cause of Hamlet's intermittent self-struggles, as revealed by all his soliloquies, becomes at once apparent. Burning with the sense of wrong, afflicted by pain, weary of suffering, and impelled by a passionate desire of "revenge," the *man* in a fierce struggle which lacerates the heart and clouds the mind,

stubbornly battles to swerve the *superman* from the counsel of prudence and justice, and to goad him on to instant "revenge."

The present soliloquy in which from reflection upon the supposed guilt of Claudius, as well as upon his own sufferings, and the imposed necessity of inaction, Hamlet's irrational lower nature of blind instincts and passions is lashed to fury by a thirst for "revenge," we see the *man* in riotous mutiny and madness railing against the check of its murderous impulse; from the wild conflict results an agony intolerable, which drives the man to the extremity of venting his ire against the restraint imposed by the insuperable will of the *superman*. The *man* dubs him a dull and muddy-mettled rascal, a John-a-dreams, who can say or do nothing in the cause of a dear father murdered and of a mother dishonored. The *man* calls the *superman* a hopeless coward on whom men may heap with impunity the most galling insults even to extreme provocation. When the gnashing hunger for "revenge" gnaws at his heart; when every fibre of his body quivers in rebellion, and his soul is tortured by mental anguish; when his mortal nature impatient of pain and weary of further suffering, revolts in a struggle that starts his blood coursing like liquid fire through his arteries; then it is that the *man* cries out in a voice which surely is not that of a weakling, but of a man of great physical courage.

Though the onslaught of the *man* of passion in his blind eagerness to slake at once his bloody thirst for "revenge," be blocked by the *superman*, he, nevertheless, persists in rebellion, plagues him without ceasing, and growing in ferocity as opposition increases, rails at him with greater vehemence, and by the sacred wounds of Christ swears a solemn oath that he must be pigeon-livered and lack courage to make oppression bitter to the "bloody, bawdy villain."

When the fury of the *man* has reached its fiercest, the *superman*, roused to action, reasserts himself, and condemning the blind and irrational rage of the man, reduces him to silence, "What an ass" he is? Surely it is far from brave to rave and fall a-cursing like a very drab and scullion, when prompted to "revenge" "by heaven and hell;" by heaven, whose messenger is the purgatorial ghost in the cause of justice; and by hell, which through rebellious passion would impel him to commit a foul crime.

The restraint imposed by the superman is not due merely to subjective causes either of cowardice, or of incapacity of action, or of morbid scrupulousness, or of weakness of will; but arises partly from subjective and partly from objective causes which for the present he is unable to remove. The superman understands that he must be guided by conscience, and his conscience forbids him to become, like Claudius, a knavish assassin. He is not seeking the murder of the King, but a just "revenge." He is seeking to fulfil a sworn resolve according to his Christian conscience, which dictates that he must satisfy, not only his own inner conscience, but also the public conscience of Denmark as to the justice of his bloody and summary "revenge." Hence the superman withholds the animal man from the mad perpetration of a crime — probably a foul murder — without having verified the reality and veracity of the ghost, and attained certainty as to the guilt of his uncle. A strong sense of honor, of justice, and of conscientious duty, therefore, stay him in the firm purpose of a just "revenge," and from rushing without proof into premature action, which would surely ruin his cause, defile his soul, and bring disgrace and odium upon his princely name.

THE PLAY'S THE THING

No sooner has the Prince subdued the warring elements within him, and recovered some calmness of mind, than he reverts to the project which he had instantly conceived at his first meeting with the Players. During the interval from the apparition of the ghost to the present moment, which was a period of little more than a month, he had been far from idle. Daily walking in feigned madness for hours at the court, and fully armed against any surprise or treachery of the King, he continually haunted his presence, and watched his every act with the hope of catching him in some new crime, or at least discovering something to authenticate the words of the ghost.

Action is his duty, but the first and necessary action in the prosecution of his purpose, is to discover whether Claudius is really guilty of the murder as the ghost had charged. Never doubting the reality of the apparition, he had reason to suspect its identity and veracity. This thought ruling his mind, Hamlet sees its realization with the arrival of the strolling players. He soliloquizes upon the rumor that felons, present at a Play which mimicked their secret crime, were so overcome by the sense of guilt as to confess their malefactions. He accordingly resolves upon a design which could not be more cunning and artful; he shall have the Players enact before the King a tragedy whose plot is parallel with that of the murder of his father. By the vivid portrayal of the crime, he will take Claudius by surprise, confront him with his secret murder, and unmask him before the whole court. If he be guilty, the criminal will blanch, and tremble, and manifest confusion, actions which, at least in the eyes of Hamlet, shall be a confession of the murder. It will warrant him to "take the ghost's word for a thousand pounds."

Strange, indeed, is the error of the subjective school, which imagines that Hamlet resorts to the play, in order to

procrastinate or delay the "revenge." On the contrary, by the play, he takes the first possible and indispensable step in the performance of a task, which demands that his knowledge of the King's guilt be beyond doubt before he strike the avenging blow, and he can obtain such knowledge only by the culprit's own confession, which, therefore, is the point on which all depends. Hence in the consciousness of this fact, Hamlet exclaims "the play's the thing, wherein I'll catch the conscience of the King."

IT MAY BE THE DEVIL

There was another reason for testing the conscience of the King. If the play, as he hoped, would unveil the secret crime of Claudius, it would also, as a consequence, assure him that the ghost was truthful, and therefore, not an evil spirit. While admitting the fact of the ghost's apparition, he had no proof of its true nature, whether it was a heaven-sent spirit for good, or a fallen angel of evil, desirous of luring him to crime. The suggestions of Hell, whose support he had instantly rejected from the first, were ever returning to his mind, exciting his passion for "revenge," and startling his conscience by the foul thoughts of red-handed murder. With reason, therefore, his fluctuating mind was troubled by intermittent doubt, as well as by the voice of conscience, which bade him be wary and cautious lest the apparition be the foul fiend, who, having power to assume a pleasing shape, might in the form of his father's ghost design to ensnare him by his wiles.

His doubting mood and his backwardness in accepting after mature reflection the word of the ghost as true, has appeared to some critics a sufficient cause for looking upon Hamlet as a sceptic. Such a view appears untenable, if we consider "that the whole fabric as expressly intimated in the first scene is based on the religious ideas and moral doctrines of Chris-

tianity.” It is, moreover, barred by the text itself; even to the casual reader it emphasizes the cause of Hamlet’s hesitation as prompted by prudent and conscientious motives; he is, therefore, free from the folly of scepticism, a theory that advocates a mental state of doubt even in the presence of rational and sufficient reasons for certainty.

Critics who adhere to the theory of Hamlet’s defective will, naturally see in his doubt an excuse for delay. One affirms that his desire *to write a play* leads him to persuade himself that he suspects. Herein is a confusion of ideas; it is clear from the text that Hamlet engaged the players to enact *the Murder of Gonzago* for the sole purpose of clearing up his doubts, and, moreover, he himself *wrote no drama*, but only inserted sixteen lines in a preexisting play.

“But in the first Act,” it is urged, “he was quickly convinced of the ghost’s identity, and not a shadow of suspicion crossed his mind since.” A little reflection will, however, show to the contrary that Hamlet in presence of the ghost was too highly excited in mind and feeling to reason calmly upon the nature of the apparition; from supreme agitation he could only listen to its woeful tale on the assumption that it was what it appeared and claimed to be. As soon as his equanimity was restored, his philosophic mind perceived on reflection, not only that the assumption was unproven, but also that there were several sane reasons for questioning the identity and veracity of the ghost. Though those anxious doubts were ever present to his mind, he saw no way of settling them, until the arrival of the players; hence his glad welcome of the actors, and his hasty determination to solve the mystery by means of the play.

But continues the critic, “The Church’s tendency to attribute unexplained phenomena to the devil, commends itself to Hamlet as affording rational excuse for delay.” Here again

we have a dual misunderstanding, the one concerning the teaching of the Church and the other concerning the mental state of Hamlet. The Church does not attribute unexplained phenomena to the devil, but only such as upon the most irresistible evidence can proceed from him alone. Concerning others, she suspends judgment as long as any doubt remains. Hamlet, therefore, had "a rational excuse" for acting contrary to the assertion of the critic; for true to the teaching of his faith, he did not attribute the phenomenal apparition to the devil; but, having no proof of its identity, suspended judgment, until he could acquire certainty. His doubt was, therefore, rational, and saved him from a rash act — a probably criminal murder.

Hamlet, in fact, is sure of the vision, but suspicious of its purpose, and this suspicion is engendered by the knowledge which he has of the unseen world, as well as by his Christian faith, which admonishes him in words addressed by St. Paul to the early Christians, that "Satan" in the temptation of man, "transformeth himself into an angel of light;"⁴¹ again, in the words of St. John, "believe not every spirit, but try the spirits, if they be of God."⁴² Moreover, his religion which reprobrates all the black arts as works of the devil, also prohibits all direct and indirect dealings with spirits of the other world, because forbidden by God's command, as recorded in Sacred Scripture.

Hamlet, as an educated Christian, knew that the souls of the dead may not return to earth without divine permission; and further, that fallen angels, or evil spirits rejected of God, can in hatred war against Him, only by warring against man, whose soul bears the image of its Maker. Simulating and impersonating the souls of the dead, these fallen spirits seek to mingle in human affairs with the hope of seducing man

⁴¹ 2 Cor. XI, 14.

⁴² 1 Jno. IV, 1.

from truth and morality. Lying spirits of hypocrisy, they are known to inculcate falsehoods and contradictions. They are known to deny fundamental truths of Christianity, — the existence of God, the immortality of the soul, future rewards and punishments, the need of religion, and all distinction between vice and virtue, — with the view of estranging man from God, and of supplanting His worship by their own perfidious cult. If “by their works ye shall know them,” their credulous human dupes are certainly without excuse, when contrary to divine prohibition, they seek to communicate with these evil spirits of hypocrisy, and blindly assume, without one iota of proof, that they are really the human souls they impersonate. Hamlet’s philosophic mind saved him from such folly, and furthermore, his Christian Faith dictated prudence and caution, in accepting without proof, the word of a ghost, of whose nature and identity he was wholly ignorant.

Hamlet’s belief in the unseen world of fallen spirits and their nefarious efforts to beguile man to evil, and thence to damnation, since dictated by his Catholic Faith, is indeed nothing surprising; but the fact, nevertheless, reveals the strange coincidence, that Shakespeare’s views fully harmonize with what Ignatius of Loyola wrote upon the same subject some eighty years before. His book, entitled “The Spiritual Exercises,” was written in 1522, and was known in England in the Poet’s day. It contains a treatise on the different methods which good and evil spirits employ in dealing with man. Presupposing as a truism, as does Hamlet in the soliloquy, that evil spirits have power to influence the human will through the intellect, by presenting sensible and imaginary objects, by stimulating the passions, and by external suggestions, the treatise affirms that, besides those interior thoughts which simply spring from our own free will and desires, there are “two other kinds of thoughts which come from without:

one from the good and the other from the evil spirit." To discriminate these movements of the intellect and will, and to determine whence they proceed, whether from the good or evil spirit, is the purpose of the twenty two directions which are given in Loyola's treatise.

It appears remarkable, indeed, that the Poet in his dramas, especially in Hamlet and to a greater extent in Macbeth⁴³ should exhibit a knowledge of this subject, which not only corresponds with Loyola's treatise on "The Discernment of Spirits," but is strongly suggestive of the work. A few citations in relation to the tragedy of Hamlet, will suffice for illustration. Loyola says, that it is peculiar to an evil spirit when dealing with a virtuous person, to approach in the guise of innocence, or in the form of an angel of light, and to begin by suggesting good thoughts which agree with the disposition of the person tempted, and afterwards to try by secret snares to pervert him to his own wickedness. Hamlet, accordingly, fears that the ghost may have been nothing more than an evil spirit, which appeared to him in the "pleasing shape" of his dearly loved father, in order to lead him the more easily into evil.

Again, Loyola says that when the impulse is towards something evil or conducive to evil, it is the work of a fallen spirit. Hence, since the ghost would impel Hamlet to revenge and to murder, he has reason to doubt its nature and identity, and fears that it is a fallen angel intent on wickedness. Loyola, again affirms, that evil spirits seek to embarrass good persons by throwing in their way every kind of scruple under specious pretexts, with the view of troubling and agitating the mind; since they like to fish in troubled waters; for when the mind is disturbed, it can less easily detect the presence and the wiles of the evil one, whose characteristic, he af-

⁴³ Vid. the author's previous work: "A Great Soul in Conflict — A New Commentary on Shakespeare's Master-work", in which the subject is fully treated.

firms, is to enter the soul in time of desolation or melancholy, in order to affect it with pusillanimity, sadness, and languor. This principle was, therefore, recognized by Hamlet, when in the consciousness of the state of his own agitated mind and deep melancholy, he affirmed that the devil "is very potent" with persons who suffer from "melancholy" and from "weakness" of a troubled mind. Actuated, therefore, by the aforesaid principles, Hamlet was very rational in doubting the identity and veracity of the ghost, and most prudent in demanding more evident and tangible proof of the supposed crime of his uncle than the unsubstantial voice of a dubious and mistrusted ghost. If the Play disclose the crime of Claudius, it will also show that the apparition which claimed to be his father's ghost is a spirit good, truthful, and worthy of his confidence. Only after this important fact has been established beyond doubt by the following Act, may he with clear conscience turn to the pursuit of the 'revenge.'

ACT THIRD

SCENE FIRST

THE REPORT OF THE SPIES

Hamlet has been thus far portrayed as harassed by fears and doubts. Before proceeding to action in an affair so momentous as the slaying of Claudius, he felt it his conscientious duty to solve his doubts, and to solve his doubts, he needed time in which he might devise some means of testing whether the message from the grave were from heaven or from hell. A delay was, therefore, dictated by prudence, and not by a desire to shirk his duty. He had, moreover, little to gain by rashness, but much from cautious procedure. If as the idol of the Danes and of the Queen-mother, he felt secure against the open treachery of the King, he relied still more on his own prowess of arms against any sudden sally of his foes. Diligently exercising himself from day to day with the skilful use of the sword, he frequented, fully armed, the halls of the court for the vigilant observance of the smiling villain, and showed himself in the mask of lunacy, not only a match for the wiles of his uncle, but even an over-match for false friends and the cunning of the intriguing chancellor.

The Third Act brings us one day further; and, without notable interruption, events move on to their dreadful climax. Hamlet in the interval had, with his usual energy, devoted himself to the practice of the Players. On the following morning, he presents himself at court in answer to a royal summons. The King was more than ever determined to discover the secret cause of his mad antics. Alone in the knowledge of his hidden crime, he had strong reasons for incredulity. If Ham-

let daily observed every move of the King, Claudius in turn observed him with no less vigilance and caution, and not satisfied with setting spies upon him, he himself maintained watchful guards about his person.

At this stage of the drama, Claudius, in supreme uneasiness at the sight of Hamlet's increasing manifestations of "turbulent and dangerous lunacy," had summoned the spies, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, to report their observations. To the disappointment of the King, they admit their ill success. They had, as he suggested, repeatedly essayed the Prince on the subject of love and ambition, but when they tried to bring him to a confession of his true state, he was loath to be sounded, and with a crafty madness kept himself aloof. Though very sparing of replies to their baited questions, he was on other subjects most copious in speech, and, while admitting his melancholy and mental distraction, he manifested a marked repugnance to touch upon their cause and origin.

The Queen next questions whether they had tempted him to resume his customary exercises, and to play anew their former games and pastimes. In reply, they narrate how but yesterday he gladly welcomed some strolling players, entertained them at the castle, and, indifferent to all else, was now devoting himself to the rehearsal of a tragedy which, according to his design, they are to play to-night before the King and Queen in presence of the whole court. Polonius confirms the report, and adds that the Prince has commissioned him to invite their majesties to attend the Play. Claudius is delighted with the news, and well satisfied at the turn events have taken, urges the spies to cultivate this new form of amusement, and to aid and stimulate Hamlet's interest in the play and Players; perchance, this diversion may lift from his mind the dark clouds of melancholy and distraction.

A STRATAGEM

Polonius enters ready to meet the challenge of the King. Assured of victory, and joyous of mood, he hurries with Ophelia into the presence of Claudius, anxious to reveal before his very eyes the fact that from the first he was correct in the diagnosis of the Prince's lunacy. The King is equally glad to accept the challenge, and eager to employ the stratagem at once, dismisses all save the chancellor and his daughter. Before the Queen departs, he informs her of the plot, and much pleased she turns in a gracious manner to the daughter of Polonius, and with words of high compliment wishes that her good beauties may in truth be the happy cause of her son's distraction, so that her virtues shall bring him to his wonted ways again. As she believes the theory of the minister, her words must have gladdened the heart of the young woman. Now that the Queen, in the presence of her father, wishes her to renew intercourse with Hamlet, she with secret joy deems herself dispensed from the harsh mandate of her parent.

After Hamlet's sworn resolve which followed the interview with the ghost, he had tested Ophelia, and sorrowfully found her devoid of the strength of character he had looked for, a fact which in the present scene, she herself confirms by her conduct. That Ophelia without a single word of protest, should willingly ally herself with the Prince's enemies; that she should without objection acquiesce, and actually play an ignoble part in her father's plot; that, above all, she should make Hamlet's powerful love for her, the snare by which she would entrap him in presence of the King, seems indeed surpassing strange, and may perhaps be explained on the supposition, that she was unaware of the full import of her conduct. She had no knowledge of the real cause of Hamlet's transformation; but she did observe that, after she had painfully repelled him, he began to show signs of dementia, which

the whole court ascribed to her unkindness. When, therefore, to test the fact, the King and her father resort to a stratagem, it is, she thinks, for her lover's good, in which she is most of all interested. If they discover the true cause of his madness to be her unkindness, they will surely see the remedy. Unfortunately, Ophelia looks upon the stratagem through the eyes of Hamlet's enemies, all unmindful of how it will be understood by her sensitive and noble-minded lover.

Whatever be the supposition, her readiness to decoy her lover, reveals her a true daughter of her father. His were low ideals of honor; with him it mattered little whether in the pursuit of ends noble or ignoble, "fair was foul, and foul was fair." It is difficult to conceive how Ophelia's mind and heart could long remain uninfluenced by the words and example of such a father, especially when, from tender years bereft of a mother's love and care, she made him her sole and supreme guide in all affairs of life. Herself undeveloped in character, inexperienced in the devious ways of the world, and without her lover's keen ethical sense and lofty ideals of justice and honor, she naturally looked upon her father's commands, regardless of their nature and their consequences, as for her the sum of all morality. Hence, she did not foresee how her act would appear so treacherous and perfidious to her lover's eyes, as to exasperate him, and bring down upon her the crashing thunders of a wrathful irony and contempt in a farewell which snapped asunder their bond of love, tore from his heart the one remaining vestige of respect for womanhood, and compelled her to realize all too late how she loved him more than life.

In the scene, the King and Polonius are concealed behind the heavy curtains of the reception hall. Ophelia apparently alone and expecting the entrance of Hamlet at any moment, assumes according to her father's order the guise of

deep recollection and prayerful mood, and fixes her eyes upon her open prayer-book. Though she seems to read, as if absorbed by devotion, her mind is actively at work on other thoughts; how, after her harsh treatment of her lover, shall she now meet him? What shall she say?—how shall she discover if his love be true and still survive? Polonius while posing Ophelia recognizes the evil nature of his plot, and emphasizes the meanness of his action by the reflection that:

“We are oft to blame in this—
'Tis too much proved—that with devotion's visage
And pious action we do sugar o'er
The devil himself.”

These words addressed to Claudius assume a greater irony, if it be borne in mind that Polonius is a caricature of the aged prime-minister of Elizabeth, who had merited Shakespeare's strong aversion by the severe prosecution of his noble patrons. His statecraft was on a par with that of Polonius, and his policy is well described in the instructions of the latter to the spy Reynaldo:

“See you now,
Your bait of falsehood takes this carp of truth;
And thus do we of wisdom and of reach,
With windlasses and with assays of bias,
By indirections find directions out.”

The hypocrisy of the times, which was the product of political and religious persecution, made a deep impression upon the Poet, and in consequence he often lashes a vice so detestable. A few specimens may be cited:

“O, what may man within him hide,
Though angel on the outward side.”
(Meas. for Meas. III. 2.)

“And thus I clothe my naked villainy,
And seem a saint when most I play the devil.”
(Rich. III. 1. 3.)

"When devils will their blackest sin put on
 They do suggest at first with heavenly shows."
 (Oth. II. 3.)

"In religion,
 What damned error, but some sober brow
 Will bless it, and approve it with a text,
 Hiding the grossness with fair ornament."
 (Merch. Ven. III. 2.)

The self-confession of hypocrisy on the part of Polonius is like wormwood to the sin-stricken soul of Claudius. It rouses him to thoughts of his own secret guilt, and, visibly affected, he discloses for the first time that he has still a conscience, and that it smarts under the lash unconsciously inflicted by his minister. As Polonius hears the approaching foot steps of Hamlet, he suddenly cuts short the King's soliloquy, and, leaving Ophelia alone in the reception hall, hurries away with Claudius to hide behind the arras.

"TO BE OR NOT TO BE"

The spies had scarcely found concealment before Hamlet enters at slow pace, wrapt in deep meditation. It is evident from the *First Quarto*, says Hunter, that the Poet intends Hamlet to enter, pondering upon what he is reading from an open book in his hand. It is a treatise on the ills of life, of death, of futurity, and of the question of being or not being, when we have shuffled off this mortal coil. Such a book was *Cardanus' Comfort*, published in 1576, a book which, Douce affirms, Shakespeare certainly possessed. His thoughts then should be regarded as rising from the objective arguments of the book, and not, as is too often supposed, from his own subjective mood and feelings. His abstraction of mind blinds him to the presence of Ophelia; and contending thoughts, which are reflected by troubled looks, find expression in the famous soliloquy, "To be or not to be."

This soliloquy has long been a fertile field in which critics have delved with very divergent results. Goldsmith wrote :

“The soliloquy of Hamlet, which we have often heard extolled in terms of admiration, is, in our opinion, a heap of absurdities, whether we consider the situation, the sentiment, the argumentation or the poetry.”

Goldsmith, though a poet, was not a philosopher, and it need not, therefore, appear surprising that the text on close examination shall seem to bear a logical order of dependent and consecutive thought. Dr. Johnson affirms :

“Hamlet knowing himself injured in the most enormous and atrocious degree, and seeing no means of redress but such as must expose him in the extremity of hazard, meditates on his situation in this manner: ‘before I can form any rational scheme of action under this pressure of distress, it is necessary to decide whether, after our present state, we are ‘to be or not to be’.”

Against this opinion is Malone, who writes :

“Dr. Johnson’s explication of the first five lines of this passage is surely wrong. Hamlet is not deliberating whether after our present state, we are to exist or not, but whether he should continue to live, or put an end to his life.”

If this opinion seem plausible at first sight, on reflection it appears superficial; against it are several eminent critics, who, we think, wisely reject it for the reason that it is not only unsupported by the text itself, but is even in contradiction with it.

That history repeats itself is an axiom which is also verified in the literary and religious world. As all *isms*, since the birth of Christianity, have striven to establish their contradictory creeds upon the same foundation of the Sacred Scripture, so in modern times have Positivists, Agnostics,

Pantheists, and Materialists attempted to read their mutually destructive teachings into the plays of Shakespeare. The right to claim him for their own, they base in no small degree upon this well known soliloquy. Such is the fate of the immortals!

Before proceeding to expose the hollowness of the claim by an analysis of the soliloquy, it is important to examine whether the text be indeed genuine and incorrupt, that is whether our modern version is really that of Shakespeare. If our text be dubious and uncertain, then the claim which the Agnostic and Pantheist build upon it, is at best but dubious and inconclusive.

The *Tragedy of Hamlet*, as enacted by Shakespeare and his company on their tour through the provinces of England in 1601, and on their return to London in 1602, was first printed in 1603, and is commonly known as the *First Quarto*. It was revised, enlarged, and reprinted in the following year. Two other editions were issued before the Poet's retirement from the stage in 1611, and in all these four *Quartos* are found many variations, as well as additions and omissions. The confusion was further increased, when seven years after the Poet's death, there appeared a new impression, known as the *First Folio*, which was printed in 1623 from an independent manuscript. It gives many passages which are not found in any of the preceding four *Quartos*, and omits others that they contain. It seems certain that the text of the *Second Quarto* (1604), as well as of the *First Folio* (1623), were prints of players' manuscripts, which had been curtailed with great freedom, and curtailed differently for the purpose of presentation, and that from these two was formed a new composite text which is known as our modern version. It differs in many particulars from the text in use in the Poet's day. These facts have led Haliwell and other eminent critics to affirm that we must be content with an imperfect text of *Ham-*

let, since a perfect copy, such as was used by Shakespeare's company, is now beyond our power of attainment. This remarkable difference is in part well exemplified in the soliloquy, if we but glance at the texts arranged in parallel columns.

Original Text of 1603

To be, or not to be, Ay, there's the point,

To die, to sleep, is that all? — Ay, all:

No, to sleep, to dream, Ay, marry, there it goes,

For in that dream of death, when we awake,
And borne before an everlasting judge,
From whence no passenger ever returned,
The undiscovered country at whose sight,
The happy smile and the accursed damn'd.

But for this, the joyful hope of this,

Who'd bear the scorns and flattery of the
world,
Scorned by the right rich, the rich cursed of
the poor.
The widow being oppressed, the orphan
wronged,
The taste of hunger, or a tyrant's reign,
And thousand more calamities besides,
To grunt and sweat under this weary life

When that he may his own quietus make,
With a bare bodkin.

Who would this endure,

Modern Composite Text

To be, or not to be, — that is the question:
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
Or to take up arms against a sea of troubles,
And by opposing, end them?

To die, — to sleep, —
No more; and by a sleep to say we end
The heart-ache, and the thousand natural
shocks
That flesh is heir to, — 'tis a consummation
Devoutly to be wished.

To die, — to sleep, —
To sleep! perchance to dream! — Ay, there's
the rub;

For in that sleep of death what dreams may
come
When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,
Must give us pause:

There's the respect
That makes calamity of so long a life;

For who would bear the whips and scorns of
time,
Th' oppressor's wrong, the proud man's con-
tumely,
The pangs of despised love, the law's delay, —
The insolence of office, and the spurns
That patient merit of the unworthy takes,

When he himself might his quietus make
With a bare bodkin?

Who'd these fardels bear,
To grunt and sweat under a weary life,

Original Text of 1603

Modern Composite Text

But for a hope of something after death?

But that the dread of something after death,—
The undiscovered country from whose bourn
No traveller returns,

Which puzzles the brain, and doth confound
the sense,
Which makes us rather bear those ills we
have,
Than fly to others that we know not of.
Ay, that, O this conscience makes cowards of
us all.

puzzles the will,
And makes us rather bear those ills we have
Than fly to others that we know not of?
Thus conscience does make cowards of us all;

And thus the native hue of resolution
Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought;
And enterprises of great pith and moment
With this regard, their currents turn awry,
And lose the name of action.

NO INTENT OF SUICIDE

If, regardless of Hamlet's actually expressed purpose at this stage of the drama, we consider only his utter contempt of life and his previous thought of suicide, the soliloquy may seem, at first appearance, to be a meditation on self-destruction and even rationalistic in tendency. Just criticism, however, requires that it be read in relation to his present position and the object which now wholly engrosses his mind. Thus viewed it discloses that the Prince, far from being disposed to self-murder and rationalistic thought, is, on the contrary, very Christian in mind and sentiment. Once, it is true, and only once in the First Act, did he really think of self-destruction. It was after his father's funeral, when the utter loneliness of his new position made his life seem purposeless; when the usurpation of Claudius and his mother's disgrace clouded his mind with dark suspicions, and steeped his afflicted soul in melancholy; then it was that he felt "how weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable are all the uses of this world," and as a consequence of that oppressive feeling came the tempting thought of suicide. But even then his mind

was fortified by Christian principles, which recognized the Creator's supremacy over life and death, and his will, yielding obedience to the moral law, conquered the foul temptation in the well known words:

O, that the Everlasting had not fixed
His canon 'gainst self-slaughter!

The supposition of suicide in the present instance assumes an inconsistency wholly foreign to Hamlet's position. It ignores the change that has come upon him after the appearance of the ghost — a change which made life no longer purposeless. If once he desired to die, now he most desires to live. In life alone could he hope to execute the command imposed upon him by his father's ghost, a command which he deemed most sacred, and was most eager to fulfil. In fidelity to his duty, he had already made it the one sole purpose of his life; "had wiped away all trivial fond records" that the commandment alone should live "within the book and volume of his brain." Unflinching, therefore, in his purpose, he was even now, not dreaming of self-destruction, but seeking to find a way to the conscientious execution of his sworn "revenge." His mind was anxiously intent upon one all-important necessary project — the solution of the vexed question,—whether the ghost was truly his father's spirit; whether the command to "revenge" was from heaven or from hell; and whether Claudius was in fact a fratricide. Having labored all the day with the actors on the tragedy to be enacted before the King, he hoped by the same to settle his every doubt that very night.

Weary after long hours of rehearsal, he is now entering the court in answer to the summons of his uncle. His eagerness to "catch the conscience of the King" absorbs his

thoughts at the present moment to the exclusion of all else, and, dwelling in curiosity upon the probable result of the play, he feels most positive that Claudius will betray his guilt. If so, his path will be cleared, and he can take measures to strike the avenging blow. Long meditation upon the revenge has, however, convinced him that he shall most probably lose his life in the act. The King, he knows, suspects the real cause of his feigned madness, and distrusting him, is never seen without his royal bodyguard; and these he sees in fancy drawing their glittering swords to strike him down at the moment when he shall thrust his avenging blade through the heart of the "smiling damned villain." If he chance to escape with his life, he must face the judges of the realm—creatures of Claudius—who, pronouncing the sentence of death, shall condemn him, an assassin, guilty of high treason in an ambitious, murderous attempt to usurp the crown.

He has come to realize vividly that there can be no escape for the slayer of the King. Hence amid the perilous circumstances in which he moves, he sees that he can avenge his father's death, only by himself falling a sacrificial victim. It is precisely at the time when his mind is weighed down by this momentous thought that we hear him, book in hand, express himself in the wonderful soliloquy. There is then no thought of suicide. There is but the one thought that in all probability *he must die*, must sacrifice his life in the act of "revenge." This is clear from the first lines of the monologue:

"To be, or not to be,—that is the question:
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
Or to take up arms against a sea of troubles,
And by opposing end them?"

A DILEMMA

The thought that strongly agitates the Prince's mind is clearly stated in the first line under the form of the dilemma, "To be, or not to be"—to live, or to die. Life or death is before him. The choice is momentous, and he alone must decide. Shall he choose to live on under present conditions, or shall he choose to sacrifice his life in the performance of the duty imposed upon him? Against the latter is a strong natural inclination, such as is intrinsic to every human being, and it prompts him to cling eagerly to life. The delight of mere living, which glows in his young heart, stirs his active nature to a peculiar horror of death. His revulsive feeling is no doubt the same as that which the Poet ascribes to Claudio, when urged by his sister to undergo death willingly:

Isabella. Be ready, Claudio, for your death, to-morrow.

What says my brother?

Claudio. Death is a fearful thing.

Isabella. And shamed life a hateful.

Claudio. Ay, but to die, and go we know not where;

To lie in cold obstruction, and to rot;

This sensible warm motion to become,

A kneaded clod; and the delighted spirit

To bathe in fiery floods, or to reside

In thrilling regions of thick-ribbed ice;

To be imprisoned in the viewless winds

And blown with restless violence round about

The Pendent world; or to be worse than worst

Of those, that lawless and uncertain thoughts

Imagine howling!—'tis too horrible!

The weariest and most loathed wordly life,

That age, ache, penury and imprisonment

Can lay on nature, is a paradise

To what we fear of death.

(Measure for Measure, Act III. Sc. 1.)

Hamlet is, however, a far nobler and more Christian character than Claudio. A burning sense of wrong, intensified by the love of his father and an unyielding fidelity to

his sworn resolve, impels him to avenge the murder, even though, in the act, he shall, as he foresees, probably lose his own life. Disturbed in feelings for the moment, and wavering in mind at the dilemma placed before him, he now inclines to one extreme, and now to another. Bravely struggling for light amid the encircling gloom of doubt, he resorts to reasoning upon the problem, whether in his present position, death after all be not preferable to life. Of a lofty mind and exalted character, he seeks as usual the nobler act: "whether it is nobler in the mind" to cling to life, and to live on, indifferent to the "slings and arrows of outrageous fortune," or whether it is nobler to lose his life by taking "up arms against a sea of troubles, and *by opposing end them.*" This latter and nobler alternative of the dilemma, which he implicitly accepts, clearly precludes all idea of self-destruction. The suicide, or self-murderer, does not take up arms against a sea of troubles, but, on the contrary, yields to them, and hopelessly and helplessly sinks beneath them by voluntarily destroying his human life. Though given by the Creator as the greatest good, existence has, under adverse circumstances or misfortune, seemingly become an unbearable burden; and the suicide rejects and destroys it on the assumption that he will find in death a peaceful sleep in exchange for the insufferable evils of outrageous fortune.

Such a false assumption is characteristic of the materialist, or non-religious man, who believes neither in God, nor in the immortality of the soul, nor in future rewards and punishments. Unaffected by the supernatural, either from ignorance or from indifference to the fact that according to the probationary law of Divine Providence, "the life of man is a warfare on earth," the non-religious man, unillumined by the light of revealed truths, and untutored in heart by Christian morals, is devoid of the inspiring impulse of Chris-

tian heroism. Hence driven back upon himself, he finds his sole strength in the weak morals of an enervating paganism, in whose blighting civilization, self-murder is sometimes an honorable expedient, and not a disgraceful act of cowardice.

In Hamlet's higher Christian civilization, suicide was, however, held in execration. It is not only unchristian, but even an unmanly act, which indicates a weak and pusillanimous mind and craven spirit, by reason of which a man fails to battle against adverse winds and storms, and cowardly sinks, a willing victim in the turbulent waters of the sea of life. Every true Christian will on the contrary, as shown by experience, rather bear like Hamlet, the ills he has "than fly to others he knows not of".

The cowardice of the suicide is, therefore, no trait of the character of the Christian Hamlet. No thought of yielding to the storm enters his mind either in the one or other alternative of the dilemma. The one alternative, which means his continued existence with an acquiescence in accomplished facts, by a disregard of his uncle's crime, of his mother's disgrace, and of the wrongs done himself and the state, seems ignoble and too abhorrent even for a passing thought; and, therefore, his mind, always enamored of lofty ideals and mastered by the love of moral good, turns at once without hesitation to the other and only alternative, even though it means his probable death in the conflict "against a sea of troubles." If he himself must brave death in the act of striking down the well-guarded criminal, so be it! It is the nobler and, therefore, will be his. How great so ever be the sea of troubles in which he feels himself immersed, he deems it nobler to battle without fear against howling winds and seething surging waters, and to brave like a hero, the violence of the storm and the roaring rage of the engulfing breakers. Hence the thought of death vividly before

him, not as an abstract idea, but in the concrete, as actually imminent and affecting himself, he naturally queries, after death what then? The question gives birth to a new train of thoughts in which, as is his wont, he philosophizes on its effects both here and hereafter:

“To die: to sleep;
No more; and by a sleep TO SAY we end
The heart-ache and the thousand natural shocks
That flesh is heir to, 'tis a consummation
Devoutly to be wished.”

“NOT DEAD BUT SLEEPING”

Meditating on the word “to die” and generalizing the idea, he dwells on the notion that death is a sleep. It is peculiarly a Christian idea. One is truly said to sleep, when, though dead, he shall be awakened, or restored again to life. Hence, the Savior said of Lazarus and of the daughter of Jairus, “They are not dead, but sleeping.” Though dead to men, they were only sleeping; because it was the fixed purpose of the Son of God, to awaken them from the sleep of death, and restore them to human life. The Christian, therefore, who, on the authority of Divine Revelation, firmly believes in the resurrection of the body on the final day of general judgment, also firmly believes that death is only a sleep — the last sleep — before the final awakening of the body to a new and eternal life. This consoling idea is emphasized in St. Paul’s letter to the early Christians, in which he exhorts them: “Be not sorrowful concerning them that *sleep* in the Lord, as the pagans who have no hope of the resurrection.”¹

Devoid of this hope, pagans were accustomed to inscribe on the tombs of their dead the words “*Hic Jacet*,” while Christians, imbued with the supernatural hope of the resurrection, invariably inscribed on their monuments, as still seen

¹ Thes. 4, 12.

in the catacombs, the words "*Hic Dormit.*" For the same reason, cremation, which was a favorite practice with the pagans, as it is to-day with many who have no Christian belief in the general resurrection of the dead, has been ever most abhorrent to the Christian mind. In fact, from the earliest days, the Church in harmony with Divine Revelation, has devoted the word "to sleep," as used in her prayers, and liturgies, and funeral rites, as synonymous with DEATH; and, accordingly, she consigns the earthly remains of her faithful children to consecrated ground, which from apostolic days, she has called cemeteries, or sleeping grounds; because in these silent cities of the dead, her children rest in peaceful sleep, awaiting the fulfilment of the promise of their God.

This idea of death as a sleep, is so common and so firmly rooted in Christian minds, that some at times, when overpowered by sorrows and afflictions, have prayed God to summon them home, that they might find rest from their bodily sufferings. It seems to hold Hamlet's mind in the sentence quoted above; for his thought is then wholly concentrated, not on the soul, but on the body merely. The intolerable evils which oppress him, prompt his Christian mind to think of death, which will rid him of bodily sufferings; of death whose peaceful slumber will end "the heart-ache and the thousand *natural* shocks that *flesh* is heir to." But such a wish is in strict conformity with Christian Faith, and accordingly Hamlet exclaims, "'tis a consummation *devoutly* to be wished," that is devoutly, or religiously in conformity with the will of God.

The Christian view of death as a sleep from which we shall again awaken, is a strong caveat against the Materialist and the Positivist, who fain would see in the dramatist a champion of their anti-Christian principles. Their teaching stands in open contradiction to that of Shakespeare. They deny the existence of God, Divine Revelation, and the future

life, affirming that the grave is the annihilation of man, whose soul at death ceases existence, and whose body entombed returns forever to its primal material elements; while the Poet in opposition adheres to the Christian principles of Divine Revelation, which inculcate truths wholly destructive of Materialistic and Positivistic theories. Even should an un-Christian doubt flash for an instant through Hamlet's mind, it would no more make him a Positivist, than would an atheistic thought, flashing upon a Christian, make him an atheist.

In the use of the word “*to say*” Hamlet shows that he does not consider death to be a sleep in the Positivistic sense; for to a philosophic mind like his, a supposition whose sole foundation is “*they say*,” can have little weight. Furthermore, against these theorists, he has already professed his firm belief in the immortality of the soul when in the First Act, he assured Horatio of his fearlessness in presence of the ghost:

“Why, what should be the fear?
I do not set my life at a pin's fee;
And for *my soul*, what can it do to that,
Being a *thing immortal* as itself?”

He, moreover, gives another and more emphatic proof of his belief in the soul's immortality in the thought which immediately follows in the same soliloquy. We give the modern as well as the original text of 1603 in parallel columns, as the one elucidates the other:

Original Text of 1603

For in that dream of death, when we awake,
And borne before an everlasting judge,
From whence no passenger ever returned,
The undiscovered country at whose sight,
The happy smile and the accursed damn'd.
But for this, the joyful hope of this,

Who'd bear the scorns and flattery of the
world, etc.

Modern Composite Text

For in that sleep of death what dreams may
come
When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,
Must give us pause:

There's the respect
That makes calamity of so long a life;

For who would bear the whips and scorns of
time, etc.

THE DREAD OF SOMETHING AFTER DEATH

From the thought of death as a peaceful sleep of the body, Hamlet, imbued with Christian principles, readily turns his gaze to the spiritual and immortal element of man's complex nature. His words are a positive disproof of the Materialistic dream that the grave is the end-all of man, both of soul and body. With Hamlet, the soul, after shuffling off its tenement of flesh, shall not sink like the body into a sleep which ends in the corruption of the grave; sleep is proper to material things alone, and therefore man's immaterial and spiritual soul can know in life and in death neither sleep nor inactivity. Shall its fate, then, be perchance to dream? But to dream implies activity, and activity necessarily involves existence. Supposing then, as Hamlet does, the continued existence of the soul after it has shed its chrysalis of clay, he dwells on the cause of that "dread of something after death," which is common to mankind. It is the passing into that "undiscovered country" of the spirit world, "whence no traveller returns" to live again his human life on earth, and where, "borne before an Everlasting Judge," the soul shall hear its sentence of justification or of reprobation.

In that "undiscovered country," of which we know so little, "the happy" are said to "smile," because of their happy reward for a virtuous life; and "the damned" are "accursed," because of their crimes. We are, moreover, assured that, buoyed up by this hope of future happiness, or deterred by the dread of future punishment, men commonly prefer to bear "the whips and scorns of time," rather than to fly to other evils that they know not of in human life. These hopes and fears, while expressed in the original text, are left to inference in the modern version in which Hamlet dwells on the "dread of something after death" — on the penalties that may affect

the soul when ushered into that undiscovered country — rather than on “the happy smile” of the blessed; for the former, owing to his present circumstances, are at the moment more in conformity with his state of mind and feelings. If St. Paul could say: “I am not conscious to myself of any thing: yet I am not hereby justified.”² Hamlet, surely, in the presence of his sworn resolve to take the life of Claudius, had reason to fear that, he himself perishing in the act, his soul on awakening in the spirit world, would be borne tainted by human blood before the tribunal of the “Everlasting Judge.” His fear was well founded; since at present he had no proof of his uncle’s guilt, save the untrustworthy word of a ghost, who might probably be a hell-sent messenger of evil. In the meanwhile, earnestly seeking light, he prefers to bear “the oppressor’s wrong, the insolence of office, and the laws delay,” — not a delay, which in his circumstances is most needful, in order “to report his cause aright,” and to “have grounds more relative” than doubts and suspicions. Hence his hand is stayed by the moral pressure of his Christian conscience, which dictates that to strike before he has allayed the doubt of his uncle’s guilt, is to hazard a blow, which is inexcusable and criminal. The fear, therefore, that he may fall in the act of “revenge” with the guilt of blood upon his soul, “gives him pause,” and is “the respect that makes calamity of so long a life.” It is a conscientious fear based on supernatural Christian faith, and is the prime influence which has so far restrained him in the drama.

The fact that non-Catholic critics of various beliefs, ignore or overlook the supernatural element in Hamlet’s restraining fear, is no doubt the cause of their many divergent views and difficulties concerning this soliloquy. If these critics, for the most part, be unacquainted with Catholic teach-

² 1 Cor. 4, 4.

ings of Faith and morals, it is clear that they will meet with difficulties on matters which are almost self evident to every educated Catholic. This ignoring of the supernatural faith which underlies the character of Hamlet, and animates his words and actions, only deepens the mystery of the drama, and makes it forever inexplicable. One may enter a grand cathedral, admire its magnificence of architecture, the long drawn nave of lofty columns and vaulting arches, the wondrous apse, the superb sculptures and paintings, and the glories of the many blending colors of windows rich in artistic emblems, and be blind all the while to the deep spiritual meaning which underlies their supernatural symbolism. To the spectator who is ignorant of the inspiring Catholic Faith that gave them birth, the grand structure remains a sealed book; and its mysterious types, figures, and mystic embellishments speak to him in accents of an unknown tongue.

The Faith which constructed these glorious monuments is the Faith of Hamlet, the Faith which moulded his noble character, enriched his gifted mind with grand supernatural truths, and quickened his manly heart to the love of virtue. Hence knowing the real value of material, transient things, he sets the eternal above the temporal; and while not caring "a pin's fee" for his mortal life, he is all concerned for the eternal lot of his soul in its immortal life beyond the grave. Death is to him the portal opening to nobler and vaster spheres; and our fleeting years, only the prelude to an unending existence which shall be, as we will, either of eternal bliss, or of irreparable despair.

CONSCIENCE THE ORACLE OF GOD

Turning from his own mental state, Hamlet now glides in philosophic mood from the particular to the universal. Men in common feel an instinctive fear of death, and if exceptions

be found, it is in those who would gladly welcome death, in order to be rid of sufferings and afflictions. Proceeding to generalize, he enumerates in classes the varied sufferings, that men bear from the same motive as his own; namely, from fear, or "dread of something after death." He reasons that as a conscientious fear of the hereafter, restrains him from striking the blow of revenge, which in all probability will cost him his life, and usher his soul into "that undiscovered country," where he must face the "Everlasting Judge," so the same potent fear "puzzles," or enervates the will even of men who wish to die, and palsies their hand in its death-dealing stroke against the "canon of the Almighty." This fear, therefore, which is dictated by a Christian's conscience, illuminated by supernatural faith, he logically concludes is the repelling element which makes cowards of us all.

Is Hamlet then a coward? Yes, surely, if fidelity to conscience is synonymous with cowardice. But fidelity to conscience springs from moral courage. A little reflection on the terms "conscience," and "coward," and "us all," discloses that in this soliloquy as in others, when, under passionate feelings of resentment, he berates himself in various ignominious terms, we should look at the real and true Hamlet, rather than at his morbid self-accusations. In the words, "us all," are no doubt included all Christians, who inspired like himself by Christian faith and influenced by its code of rectitude, have a conscientious fear of violating the moral law of God. All others, therefore, are excluded: unbelievers of every class who, blind to the Christian light of faith, and, uninfluenced by its ennobling code of morals, dwell in outer darkness. They live in a fallen nature unregenerated, and are devoid of a salutary fear of God's law. In irreligious blindness, such are wont to dream vain dreams: they imagine that the grave is the ultimate goal of man, both of his perishable body and his

indestructible spiritual soul. Hence beyond their horizon all seems nothingness and, in consequence, they fall easy victims to life's fitful fever, and the passing ills that flesh is heir to.

It appears from the context that Hamlet employs the word "conscience," not as some suppose, as a term synonymous, with thought or speculation, or even consciousness, but as a philosopher, in its specific and ethical signification. Conscience thus accepted, means the intellectual faculty of the soul employed in the consideration of an act in relation to moral rectitude or depravity. In its very origin, the word implies a double or joint knowledge; the one of the natural or Divine Law, and the other of man's own action in conformity or difformity with that same law. Thus considered, conscience is the voice of God, the herald of His law, and our guide in every moral act:

"Whatever creed be taught, or land be trod,
Man's conscience is the oracle of God."

A dictate of conscience is then an intellectual act, or judgment of our reason concerning the good or evil of something, which a man is solicited to do or not to do. It does not determine the nature and difference between good and evil in general, or in the abstract; it only determines the good and evil relation of a particular act to him who is solicited to do it under given circumstances, and imperatively commands him, by reason of his moral obligation, to do the one and to refrain from the other. As a consequence, obedience to this dictate of reason, or judgment of conscience, brings ease and quiet of mind; whilst disobedience begets uneasiness and remorse. While Wolsey served his king better than his God, he was never free from the stings of conscience; but when, after realizing

. "how wretched
Is that poor man that hangs on princes' favors,"

he began to serve his God better than his king, the Poet describes the change which was wrought upon his conscience :

“Never so truly happy, my good Cromwell.
I know myself now; and I feel within me
A peace above all earthly dignities,
A still and quiet conscience.”

When Richard III. was roused to a sense of guilt by his ghostly visitors, his conscience caused him to exclaim in fear :

“My conscience hath a thousand several tongues,
And every tongue brings in a several tale,
And every tale condemns me for a villain.”
(V. 3.)

In the same tragedy the thought of the judgment day troubles the conscience of one of the murderers, when about to assassinate the duke of Clarence :

Sec. Murd. The urging of that word “judgment” hath bred a kind of remorse in me.

First Murd. I thought thou hadst been resolute.

Sec. Murd. ‘Faith, some certain dregs of conscience are yet within me. It is a dangerous thing; it *makes a man a coward*; a man cannot steal, but it accuseth him; he cannot swear, but it checks him; ‘tis a blushing shamefast spirit that mutinies in a man’s bosom; it fills one full of obstacles.” (I. 4.)

It was the same with Hamlet; his conscience caused the superman to fight against the man when the latter urged him to slay Claudius before he had any positive and tangible proof of his guilt. The rebellious man might call the superman a coward, but such a cowardice was a bravery that armed him with prudence and fortitude against the perpetration of a probable murder.

COURAGE OR COWARDICE

Conscience, which induces a fear of the punitive sanction of the law, whether human or divine, is a salutary check, and

its warning creates a caution, which implies, not cowardice, but courage to repress lawless passions and rebellious appetites. Hence, infidelity to conscience unmasks the coward, while fidelity discloses a manhood inspired with noble prowess. An habitual fidelity to conscience "inspires a man," says Milton, "with a gallant fearless courage, which tempered with precepts of true fortitude and patience, turns into a native and heroic valor and makes him hate the cowardice of doing wrong." Such a conscientious man, whether riding on the wings of prosperity, or enshrouded in the gloom of adversity, will with unfaltering courage prove himself sublimely unafraid. Moral courage is a far nobler quality than physical. It is solely characteristic of human kind. It alone forms the basis of man's moral life, which consists in the conformity of his actions with the law of conscience; and the more he unites in himself both physical and moral courage, the more his character approaches perfection.

That such a union exists in Hamlet, appears from the Poet's high accentuation of the one trait and the other. His hero values his physical life at less than "a pin's fee;" moves through the drama, fearless of danger; encounters the appalling spectre and follows its beckoning; exposes himself from day to day to the treacherous wiles of the cunning usurper; braves in fearless counterplot his perfidious design to murder him by proxy; dares in desperate valor to leap alone aboard the grappling ship of the pirates; accepts without fear the challenge from the King in spite of warnings of treachery and evil; and in fine, furiously defying the royal guards and courtiers, breaks through their defence, to pierce the heart of the cowering criminal. If all these and similar occurrences prove that the Poet's design was to portray in Hamlet a hero whose personal bravery was undaunted in every danger, and against all odds, there are other proofs that show his fur-

ther design to picture him with moral courage, which makes him loyal and unswerving to conscientious duty.

As the Wise Man, Hamlet believes that "he that ruleth his spirit is better than he that taketh cities." His remarkable courage is engendered by the righteous fear of committing crime, and this "fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom — is the fullness of wisdom — is the crown of wisdom, a wisdom which distributes knowledge and understanding of prudence, and exalts the glory of him who possesses it."³ His glory, therefore, is the testimony of a good conscience. Aware that as a man treats his conscience here, so it will deal with him in the hereafter; aware that at the bar of the "incorruptible Judge," the testimony of his conscience shall be the sole umpire of his eternal fate, Hamlet had indeed under present circumstances, strong rational grounds for uneasiness of mind.

ENTERPRISES OF GREAT PITH AND MOMENT

The closing lines of the soliloquy offer other refutations of the supposition entertained by certain critics that Hamlet contemplates the act of self-slaughter:

"And thus the native hue of resolution
Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought;
And *enterprises of great pith and moment*
With this regard their currents turn awry,
And lose the name of action."

In these words we have an explicit reference to a fixed resolve. Is the term to be interpreted, as some say, to mean a resolve of self-destruction? Clearly not: there is nothing in the whole drama to show that Hamlet had at any time *resolved* to take his own life. In a former Act, he at once rejected even the thought of suicide, because to his Christian mind, it was contrary to the law of God; nor, furthermore,

³ "Ecclesiasticus", 1.

is there anything to indicate that he afterwards entertained the thought, and resolved upon it. Since his "resolution," therefore, does not mean a resolve to suicide, there remains possible but one other interpretation, which, indeed, seems clear to every mind not biased by the preconceived and unsupported theory of suicide.

Hamlet's "resolution" necessarily implies some resolve he had already taken, but which he now hesitates to carry out, and that this resolve is his sworn purpose to avenge the murder of his father, the drama clearly reveals on almost every page. It is the one sole resolve at all times before his eyes; upon it his thoughts are ever concentrated; to its fulfilment he has solemnly devoted his energies and his life; and even now he has in hand a project which he hopes will remove the difficulty in his path. The "resolution," however, at the present moment is "sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought," because, in the contemplation of the deed of "revenge," he foresees that he himself shall most likely fall; hence he dwells upon the thought; meditates upon "to be or not to be," upon existence or non-existence; since it is not to him a matter of indifference, whether or not he himself shall perish in the contest. This want of indifference to life or death is the prime factor of the whole soliloquy, and gives rise to the *pros* and *cons* of its development.

If the term "resolution" does not mean his sworn resolution of "revenge," it can only mean a resolve to suicide; but this alternative, though already shown to be inadmissible, is further made untenable by the words of Hamlet himself, when he affirms that his "resolution" is an "*enterprise of great pith and moment.*" Such an enterprise, however, is not suicide; self-destruction, by which a man in cowardice yields unresisting to the storms of life, and in a timidity born of a craven spirit, seeks to evade in death the evils which oppress

him, rather than with manful courage to battle vigorously against them, cannot by any jugglery of words, be called an "enterprise of great pith and moment." Something more than shirking a burden, something more than sinking to rest from care and trouble, is demanded to justify the use of the emphatic phrase, and the only "resolution" which can verify and justify the import and emphasis of the words, is his sworn resolve of "revenge."

Such a resolution implies, indeed, as no other, an "enterprise of great pith and moment." To avenge the foul murder of his idolized father; to unveil to public gaze the villainy of the secret criminal; to snatch the crown from his brow, and hurl from the throne a bloody, lecherous usurper; to rouse from her moral lethargy a mother whose conscience has been blunted by a life of shame; to purify a corrupted court from the tainted atmosphere of foul sycophants;—all this, beyond doubt, is and must be called an "enterprise of great pith and moment,"—an enterprise which from the vivid contemplation of his own want of indifference to loss of life, and to the uncertain fate that may await him in the spirit world, "is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought and loses the name of action."

A RATIONALIST'S OBJECTION

A German Rationalist⁴ and follower of the subjective school, in commenting on this soliloquy, says: "Hamlet is not free-minded enough to do violence to his conscience which forbids suicide." We feel grateful for this open admission; it unwittingly aligns the professor against skeptics, rationalists, infidels and materialists who have at times attempted to prove that Hamlet was their own. Of these different schools of Freethinkers, Addison humorously remarks: "Atheist is

⁴ Gervinus, "Shakespeare Commentaries, Hamlet".

an old fashioned word. I'm a Freethinker." Every man enjoys freedom of thought, as freely as the air he breathes; but every thought is not necessarily true, and Freethinkers, notwithstanding their boasted freedom, are known to be the slaves of many errors.

It is a fallacy to assume that freedom to think as we please, gives us power to fashion truth as we please; subjective thought is one thing, and another is its actual and objective reality; and, therefore, since thoughts are subjective, they are necessarily true or false, according as they conform or not to the objective truth, or reality of things. Truth and not freedom is the proper object of the intellect, and its possession gives freedom, while error blinds and enslaves the mind: "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." Freethinking is one of the many *isms* consequent upon the religious revolution of the 16th century. The "Reformers" made private judgment the basic principle of religion, and its logical development is seen in the different classes of Freethinkers, who reject Christianity, as well as all revealed religion under every form; deny human and divine authority; and have no faith in God, nor in the immortality of the soul, nor in a future life. Hamlet in opposition, as appears from the drama, professes belief in all these doctrines.

Freethinkers are akin to anarchists: both claim untrammelled freedom from control of any kind, a claim so obviously opposed to common sense and experience, as to place it under the ban of right reason. The freest of mankind is subject to innumerable restrictions under greater or less penalties; the most assertive libertine of thought finds limitations within and without on every side. He must observe the laws of thought (or logic) under pain of unintelligibility; he must, even after rejecting the infallible word of God, sub-

mit to fallible human testimony, or remain grossly ignorant, and, in fine, how great soever his intellectual pride, he must admit himself to be circumscribed in knowledge by a limitation, which arises from the finiteness of his nature and mental powers.

A Freethinker, like an anarchist, revels in false notions of human liberty. Liberty is not license; liberty is not the freedom of a madman; liberty is not the power to do wrong, nor to adhere to falsehood, nor to err from the path of justice. Liberty, says Cardinal Manning, means freedom from sin and falsehood, which fetter men's minds; from fallible human teachers that err and lead to error. True liberty is freedom from all corporal and spiritual tyranny of man over man; it is the liberation of the whole man with all his faculties, his intellect, his heart, his will, and his affections. Never was there true liberty before Christianity, and never shall there be when Christianity shall cease to enlighten the government of men.

The Professor complains that Hamlet does not "do violence to his conscience." A strange objection, indeed, to all save Freethinkers, who profess laxity of morals in the Christian sense, both in theory and in practice; and stranger still, when we reflect that a man who violates his conscience, acts against his rational nature, rejects the light of truth which reason offers him, and becomes the slave of error and of passion. Conscience is the intellectual faculty, which distinguishes right from wrong, and directs man's free will in the choice of good and the avoidance of evil. In following its guidance, man exercises his rational freedom; but when, rebellious against the voice of conscience, or the light of reason, he yields himself a slave to error, or to blind instincts or passions of his animal nature, he obliterates in the very

act, the distinctive mark between himself and the brute creation. Hamlet, however, was truly free-minded, because he was neither a slave of error nor of passion. A lover of truth, he enjoyed the freedom which it brings, and, illumined by the light of reason and religion, followed the voice of conscience, which bade him beware of committing a crime against his own rational nature, as well as against the law of God.

Again, the Professor in rationalistic spirit complains that "moral and intellectual considerations, conscience, and thought, are drags upon Hamlet's power of action." Drags, they surely are upon the power of committing a rash action, which, in Hamlet's present light, can seem nothing more than probable murder. This fact, though objected to by non-Christian men, is, nevertheless, the very trait in Hamlet's character, which ennobles and endears him to every Christian mind. These "drags," or restraints imposed upon human conduct by the moral law of conscience, are absolutely necessary, if man would be in fact, a social being, as nature has intended. These moral drags are barriers against lawlessness and anarchy, and without them there can flourish no political and social life. If their observance makes men good and desirable citizens, their disregard creates criminals, multiplies prisons, and arms every man against his neighbor. A man who ignores conscience is a menace to his fellowmen: he is fit for treason, stratagems, and crimes. Highly commendable, therefore, to the Christian, if not to the rationalistic mind, must be Hamlet's action, when in obedience to the law of morals, made known to him by the voice of conscience, he resisted and subdued the blind impulse of the man of his lower nature against the superman's prudential dictates of reason and religion.

NO FRIAR LAURENCE

Turning from Gervinus to another professor of a spirit more aggressive, we come to a commentator who, though less rationalistic and, perhaps, professing some form of Christianity, soils the pages of his work with unbecoming and often unwarranted attacks upon the olden Church. In commenting on the famous soliloquy in question, he ventures the following aspersions:

“There is no Friar Laurence in this play. To him the Catholic children of Verona carried their troubles and received from their Father comfort and counsel. Hamlet is hardly the man to seek for wisdom or for succor from a priest. Let them resolve his doubts about the soul, about immortality, about God first. But Shakespeare has taken care to show us in the effete society of Denmark, where everything needs renewal, what religion is, a religion which makes Hamlet an aimless wanderer after truth.” (Dowden, *Shakespeare, His mind and Art*, p. 136.)

These gratuitous remarks expose a rancorous spirit, which evidently swerved the Professor from the even tenor of his way, for the purpose of casting even inopportunately a few darts at the religion which Hamlet loved and professed. The principle that the end justifies the means, may sway a commentator, whose object is to gain the favor of a certain class of readers, whose ears he hopes to tickle by pandering to their prejudices; but a rational critic is justly supposed, in condemnation of such practices, to be free-minded enough to divest himself of musty and biased judgments. To merit the attention of discerning readers, he should like a judge, rise superior to idiosyncratic views and personal prejudices, in order to interpret impartially the works of a world-renowned dramatist, who himself, uncircumscribed by time, place, and conditions, frowned on all narrowness either in the intellectual or religious world. Nothing blurs men's men-

tal vision more than a subjective bias of mind, and this bias seems to have caused the Professor's failure to fathom the character of Hamlet, and to read it aright on the subject in question. In proof hereof, let us weigh his remarks seriatim :

“There is no Friar Laurence in this play.”

True, nor is there a Friar in many another of Shakespeare's plays; for the simple reason that none is called for. In desiring Friar Laurence to be multiplied in the Poet's dramas, does not the Professor suddenly forget his often manifested dislike of Friars and of the Faith which they professed? Shakespeare was too great a master of the dramatic art to conform to the Professor's wish. He realized the axiom that “variety is the spice of life;” and, therefore, refrained from introducing a Friar, how estimable soever in character, into each of his dramas. Such an uncalled for multiplication of Friars would moreover tend, not to enhance, but to diminish popular interest in his plays with audiences which, like the Professor, were strongly anti-Catholic.

If in *Romeo and Juliet*, the Poet has strikingly displayed his love for religious men, by luminously portraying in Friar Laurence a beautiful and winning character most estimable for his charity and self-forgetfulness, his portrayal is in harmony with the original story; but, no doubt, perceiving how exotic a plant a Friar would seem in the drama of Hamlet, if-transplanted from sunny Italy to the still wild and chilling regions of a dissipated Northern court, he preferred to adhere to the mythical pagan legend in which there is no possible Friar. The critic is, furthermore, unfortunate in his objection, from forgetfulness of the fact that the same religion which could fashion in Verona, as the Poet shows, so lovable a character as Friar Laurence, could, of course, also

duplicate him at Elsinore under similar favorable conditions. The Professor continues :

“To him (Friar Laurence) the Catholic children of Verona carried their troubles and received from their Father comfort and counsel. Hamlet is hardly the man to seek for wisdom and succor from a priest.”

That Romeo and Juliet turned to the Friar for comfort in their troubles, and for guidance in their perplexities, was only a natural impulse, which prompts a man in difficulties to lean upon a trusted friend. From childhood they had learned to know the Friar's wisdom, charity, and disinterestedness, and their young hearts had come to love, and to confide in him. Under their sunny skies, religious as well as social life differed far from that of the austere regions of the Northern lights. In the latter, Christianity was still struggling ; in the former, she had swayed for centuries. In her schools noble youth were accustomed to learn from the lips of priest or Friar, the wisdom and knowledge of a Christian civilization, and could not fail to admire virtuous lives, and to realize that in their tutors, whether priest or Friar, they would find their friend, best councilor, and guide. But Elsinore was not a Verona, nor Hamlet a Romeo. Herein is manifest the dramatic skill of the artist and his consistency in the portrayal of characters so divergent. Romeo's warm effusion is in striking contrast with the severe reserve of Hamlet, and indicates a nature as different as is the tropic from the arctic zone.

Light was the character of the youth of the South, a creature of circumstances, open, confiding, impassioned, and effusive with the glowing warmth of his sunny clime ; but grave, melancholy, and unconfiding was the youth of the leaden skies of the North. Unimpassioned in character, distrustful, meditative, deeply penetrating, and accustomed to

retire within himself, he sought to master unaided the problem which perplexed him. If the noisy shallow brooklet babbles its story to the world, the mighty stream profound, ruffled in surface, or lashed by gale or storm, flows on in a silent, solemn calm undisturbed in depths below. The calm and depth of Hamlet's Character was due to his master-mind, and to his perfect control of his emotions and his passions. His powerful intellect, so reflexive and so philosophic, read by a luminous penetrating glance, as in an open book, every character that passed before him, and discerned their motive springs of action, their foibles and their failures, and their designs and artifices. His reflective soul in the gloom of oppressing difficulties recoiled upon itself and, shutting out the external world, brooded upon causes, effects, and all possible consequences. If in these melancholy musings he persistently rejected every thought or impulse to consult a third party, would it not seem strange and contradictory in a character so deeply rooted in silence and reserve, to confide to a priest or Friar the dreadful secret of which he would not even whisper a suspicion to Horatio, the one tried and trusted friend, whom he promised to "wear in his heart's core, aye, in his heart of heart"?

This guarded reticence of Hamlet which results from his characteristic disposition, is further strengthened by the nature of his doubts. While certain of the reality of the ghostly vision, he has reasonable motives for questioning its identity and veracity. These he perceives can be verified, not by consultation with priest or layman, but only by "catching the conscience of the King;" and for this he has already in hand a well prepared plan. Moreover, Hamlet's guarded reticence, as contrasted with the effusiveness of Romeo, was necessary; since the Poet designed to give a different artistic effect to the two plays, and this required a

different treatment. Having made Hamlet melancholic and burdened him with a harrowing task, the dramatist found it expedient to involve him in a tragic atmosphere of gloom and disturbance of mind, and such a state precluded the presence of a priestly counselor or guide. The Professor, therefore, instead of complaining that the Prince does not seek the guidance of a priest in his difficulties, should rather admire the Poet's skill in adhering to consistency in the portrayal of Hamlet's character.

LET PRIESTS RESOLVE HIS DOUBTS

Again the Professor says:

“Let them (the priests) resolve his doubts first about the soul, about immortality, and about God.”

But there is nothing in the drama to show that Hamlet doubts about the soul, or immortality, or God. Hence, every Christian reader will feel impelled to enter a protest against these unworthy insinuations, which are based upon the assumption that the primal principles of Christianity were in the mind of Hamlet enclouded with doubt, and that learned ministers of the Church could not solve these doubts if they would. These bare assumptions are unsupported by the text.

There is no doubt concerning the period of time in which Shakespeare's Hamlet lived. By multiplied incidents and phrases, the Poet emphasizes this period as the early years of the eleventh century, and introduces us for the first time to the Prince on his return from school in Germany, where he for long imbibed the waters of wisdom at the fountain seats of Christian learning; for as already shown, no others existed in Germany at that period. Within these schools, where the name of infidel, or agnostic, or materialist was as odious as that of the “unspeakable Turk”, tutors, rich in phil-

osophic lore, not only shared with eager pupils their knowledge of Aristotle,⁵ but also labored to imbue their minds with those grand truths of Christianity which, grounded on principles eternal and immutable, and supported by rational arguments, have withstood all sophistry, and swayed at all times the master-minds of every sphere of life.

Returning from these halls of wisdom to his rude native land, the Prince, as conspicuous as a lone sturdy oak in a desert wild, moved amid his less civilized people, a cultured gentleman of high mental attainments and moral refinement, which placed him more than a century in advance of conditions then prevailing among semi-Christian Northmen. Moving amid the social life of a contaminated court, he appears in the drama a polished man of grand mental gifts, a philosopher of lofty ideals, who, moreover, far from doubting, is imbued with the supernatural truths of Christianity. Against the Professor, the drama, again and again, emphasizes in express terms Hamlet's belief in Christianity, in the supernatural, in the existence of God, in His moral law, and in His all ruling Providence; his belief in the spirituality and immortality of the soul, and in a life beyond the grave; his belief in purgatory, in preternatural agencies, as angels and demons; his belief in grace, and in the efficacy of prayer and the sacraments. All this the drama luminously reveals to every reader whose mental vision is not jaundiced by prejudice, nor obscured by some color of error against the white light of truth. Gratuitous, therefore, and uncalled for, must seem the Professor's words: "Let them (the priests) resolve his doubts about the soul, about immortality, about God first."

⁵ Aristotle's philosophy was translated into Latin by Boethius in the sixth century. It was adopted by Christian philosophers in the schools of western Europe from the beginning of the ninth century. Later it was made the basis of a rational exposition of Christian dogma.

AN AIMLESS WANDERER AFTER TRUTH

But, again, the Professor remarks:

“But Shakespeare has taken care to show us in the effete society of Denmark, where everything needs renewal, what religion is, a religion which makes Hamlet an aimless wanderer after truth.”

If Shakespeare clearly reveals the effete social life of Denmark, it is no less clear that, contrary to the Professor, he carefully refrains from attributing this effete condition to the Christian religion, and from making it the cause of Hamlet's so called aimless wandering after truth. The Professor's assumption might bear some semblance to truth, if we ignore altogether the civil and religious conditions actually prevailing in Denmark at the time of Shakespeare's Hamlet. As noted previously, the sun of Christian civilization, which had long illumined the nations of the South, shone with less vigor upon the remote regions of the North, where Norsemen with minds still involved in pagan myths, continued within their wilds the worship of Odin. If upon their hostile shores, successive missionaries had at intervals during three centuries, planted the cross under one monarch, it was overthrown by the next. Even in Hamlet's day, Christianity, known mainly in the maritime towns, was still struggling for free existence, and, without permanent organizations and schools, relied solely upon the zealous efforts of volunteer missionaries; hence in her first notable success under royal patronage, conversions among the upper classes and in the centres of population, were often lacking in thoroughness for want of training and instruction.

Paganism could not be erased at a stroke from the mind of the nation. It thrived side by side with the Christian religion, and long overshadowing it, maintained with stubborn hold its infectious influence upon the thoughts, and manners,

and customs of the people. This we see in Polonius, and in the libertine Laertes, whose character the Poet sketches in shadows scarcely illumined by a flickering ray of Christian light. Again we see it in Claudius and in Gertrude, whose composite characters, like a mixture of oil and water, portray a medley of the repelling elements of the pagan and the Christian religions.

In these portrayals are clearly exposed the cause of the depravity of social life in Denmark, where paganism yet ruled the masses; where in high places, servile courtiers, in mimicry of royalty, attempted to put on the new Christian man, without putting off the old pagan, and, while openly professing Christianity, nevertheless, inwardly adhered to all that flattered fallen nature, to all that was dear in the customs and laws of their native paganism. Hence to ascribe the evils of the social life, which a corrupt paganism had originated, and supported, and familiarized the masses with for centuries, to the Christian religion, which was yet struggling in many parts for existence, and in others for free development, is beyond doubt a glaring injustice. There was, therefore, no need of a "renewal" of the Christian life of the people, which, as the Professor supposes, was then in decline, but there was a pressing need of the destruction of the religion of Odin with all its evils, and the conversion of the masses to the Christian religion, which was to bring them the manifold blessings of a new, and higher civilization.

To demand an impossibility of the Christian religion, and then to blame it for not doing the impossible, is assuredly a great injustice. It is impossible for the Church to influence the lives of men who will not hear her. If we would know her salutary influence, we must logically look to her true children, who accept her doctrines, and practice her moral precepts, and not to renegades who reject them. She has

made many and many a saint, whilst every criminal, nominally within her fold, is a criminal in spite of her, and solely because he will not follow her spiritual guidance, and submit to her moral influence. In exemplification, the Poet exhibits on the one hand, a noble-minded Hamlet in his Christian character, and on the other, human nature unregenerated in a wicked Claudius.

Surprising, moreover, is the Professor's notion that the Catholic religion makes Hamlet "an aimless wanderer after truth," surprising, because Catholics adhering to an infallibly teaching Church, are commonly supposed to be freed from the necessity of groping after religious truth. The dual charge of the Professor seems, however, not only without support, but even in contradiction to the drama itself. Shakespeare clearly makes Hamlet a wanderer after truth, not indeed religious truth, but truth concerning the crime revealed by the ghost. Nowhere does he portray him as "an *aimless* wanderer," but always as a man who, with a fixed aim to the exclusion of all else, seeks to satisfy his conscience. Hence his aim is single and unswerving. It is to attain, notwithstanding remarkable difficulties, positive proofs of his uncle's guilt. Until he has this proof his Christian moral feelings struggle against the natural promptings of "revenge," and in consequence there ensues a repeated conflict between the pagan and the Christian elements of his nature.

In the attainment of these proofs, the Prince, far from being "an *aimless* wanderer after truth," reveals himself, with an unfaltering aim in persistent search, from the moment that he hears the dread secret, until before the whole court, he unmask the royal hypocrite, and, in the consummation of his sworn "revenge," strikes the blow which, to the eyes of all, is a merited retribution. No man ever faced a

task so seemingly impossible, and only his persistent aim, despite ever recurring obstacles, won for him a victory, which at once saved his own honor, and avenged the foul murder of his father.

Like the two foregoing commentators, there are others, who fail to grasp fully the real character of Hamlet; because, ignoring his Christian Faith, they insist on seeing him from their own subjective view. It seems surely rational that if we would know the real or objective Hamlet, we must cast aside all preconceived personal views, prejudices, and most of all religious bias. It is only by turning back to the long ago, and seeing him in strange circumstances, actuated by thoughts, impulses, and emotions, which in the main are dominated by the religious beliefs and moral tenets of the Church, that we may come to know him, to understand the composite elements of his nature, and truly see and appreciate the worth of the man, who among all the creations of the Poet's genius, is universally acknowledged to be unique and unapproachable.

LAWFUL ESPIALS

In the meanwhile the King and Polonius, concealed behind the arras in the throne-room, were impatiently awaiting Hamlet's awakening to the presence of Ophelia. Posed by her father, with her eyes intently fixed in pious gaze upon the open pages of her prayer book, she demurely sat, seemingly oblivious of her surroundings. The Prince having finished his soliloquy of troubled and perplexing thoughts, turns from the ideal to the real world of action. Pursuing his course in quest of the King, he stays his steps when the presence of Ophelia beams upon him in surprise like a sudden flash of light. For the moment his gloomy thoughts are banished. Her presence awakens the slumbering sentiments of

former affection, and, forgetful of his assumed role of lunacy, he addresses her in gentle terms of tenderness.

Here, as usual, when taken by surprise, Hamlet gives sudden utterance to the thoughts habitually current in his mind. When surprised by his father's ghost, he appealed for aid to heaven in the words, "angels and ministers of grace defend us," and now, when suddenly stumbling upon the unexpected presence of Ophelia, his exclamation again indicates his Christian faith in the remission of sins by the power of prayer: "Nymph, in thy orisons be all my sins remembered."

The position of Ophelia in the present scene, if anomalous, is, nevertheless, a luminous index to her character. It reveals the lack of large mental powers and of the usual sagacity of the feminine mind, quick to perceive the changing moods of her lover, to sympathize with him, and, if need be, to support him in his overmastering grief. The Poet leaves to our fancy her relations to Hamlet in the earlier days of courtship, when they pledged mutual love, and exchanged tokens of affection; but these tokens were inconsiderate trifles to a man like Hamlet, with whom a larger exchange of the nobler qualities of mind and heart was impossible with a character so negative, unenergetic of will, and passionless. When Ophelia, therefore, speaks of returning his gifts, the offended Hamlet could truly say "I never gave you aught!" Unwise, at least, was her untimely purpose of forcing back his gifts upon him in his present melancholic and distracted mood. Action so inopportune, and which he knew was dictated by her father, could only further irritate his sensitive soul, and let loose his long pent-up feelings.

Ophelia did not fathom the depth of Hamlet's character. After being untrue to her lover, not only by failing to make a serious defence of his honor, but also by accepting the

evil insinuations made by her father and Laertes; after having rejected his letters, and closed her doors upon him without any provocation, and without assigning any cause for her strange conduct, she, nevertheless, with true womanly instinct, assumes the role of injured innocence, and even worse, without demur pliantly lends herself, a decoy, to lure into the snare of his enemies her most sensitive lover—a man whose lofty mind and refined moral sense abhor—as the foulness of Erebus every form of falsehood and hypocrisy. No characteristic of Hamlet is more vividly portrayed than his love for moral worth, his longing for sincerity and truth, and his actual revulsion of feeling against every individual in whose words and actions he detects affectation, or duplicity, or falsehood under its varied forms.

ARE YOU FAIR, ARE YOU HONEST

After his surprise and first affectionate greetings to the lone Ophelia, his penetrating mind could not long fail to grasp the situation; and in consequence of dark suspicions of foul play, which suddenly flashed before him, he was at once upon his guard against any intended treachery. The unusual position of Ophelia, sitting alone in the throne-room, engaged in devotions; the sight of his many tokens of love accumulated beside her, with the evident intention of returning them on meeting him: her strange look and unnatural manner, her formal words and studied phrases: as—

“Their perfume lost,
Take these again; for to the noble mind
Rich gifts wax poor when givers prove unkind,”

forced on him the belief that she was acting a role assigned her. Her words disclose the nature of her thoughts. The burden of her father's reproof had been Hamlet's dishonor-

able love and the danger to her virtue. As long as his affection seemed honest, she had treasured his "sweet remembrances"; but now, that his love is reputed ignoble, his "rich gifts have lost their perfume," and she, a virtuous maid of "noble mind" feels constrained to "re-deliver" them. Is it surprising that such words were supremely irritating to a man whose conduct towards his mother shows him most severe in regard to sexual relations? Ophelia, but not her lover, had been unkind. She had indeed been far from "noble minded" when without resentment she listened to the defamation and vilification of his character, and without proof believed ignoble charges against him. His known honor and her intimate relations with him should have armed her against the two slanderous wiseacres.

Her words begot an intense resentment, which was heightened by her exhibition of duplicity and unfaithfulness. It roused his truthful, loving soul to abhorrence; and this abhorrence grew stronger when, in forcing back his gifts upon him, she sought to cloak her conduct under the pretense of suspecting his motives to be dishonorable. She seems to have deserted to the camp of the hated usurper, and, like his mother, to be dead to the virtue of honesty and the sentiments of honor. This thought fills his soul with affliction; and beneath the extravagant outburst, which the situation has forced upon him, he labors to veil his genuine grief. He is in the home of his cunning enemy, who suspecting his knowledge of the murder, and doubting the reality of his mental malady, had set upon him spies who were dogging his every footstep, and of these the worst was Ophelia's own father.

Suspicious flit through his mind from the strangeness of his position. He sees himself surrounded by eavesdroppers with the lone maiden placed in his path, as a puppet, to

enmesh him in their well-laid snare. If they will test his sanity; if they will have visible proofs of his love for Ophelia, he will accommodate them with full vengeance. Hence, the voice which at first had naught but tender words for Ophelia, now suddenly assumes a harshness, under which concealing the bitterness of his wounded love, he breaks forth in wild bewildering, ironical laughter. The charge that he has badly treated a virtuous maiden, prompts questioning words of mockery: "Ha, ha! Are you honest? Are you fair?" How startling to the eavesdroppers, and how disturbing to the serene composure of Ophelia, must have been the piercing force of these sarcastic questions so suddenly shot forth in exposure of her duplicity? "Are you honest," or sincere? "Are you fair," or just? Ophelia seems not to understand the meaning of his words, and Hamlet, not wishing to betray himself, now repeats the terms in a new sense, which bears an ironical allusion to her father's injunction against association and converse with him. If she be "honest and fair," if she be virtuous and beautiful, she should not discourse with him, nor walk in the sun, but remain at home in seclusion, to guard her virtue jealously against the shafts of flattery, which her beauty might occasion in consorting with men. In proof, he appeals to the force of a paradox, that no honesty of woman can withstand temptation, and ironically applies it to herself; since she "gives it proof" in her duplicity, and then he exclaims in tones of sad regret, "I did love you once!"

The word "once" must have been a shock to Ophelia's young heart; it revealed that his love was dead. The shock was not lessened by his further ironical reply, that she should not have believed his protestations of love. The irony of his words lay in her supposed acceptance of her father's low estimate of his character, in accordance with which he

was a dishonorable man unworthy of trust, and, therefore, she should not have believed his words of love.

At this point, resulting, perhaps, from the sudden recollection of his actual position, Hamlet's thoughts turn in a new direction. Unable to reveal to Ophelia the ghostly secret and the real cause of his seeming madness; unable to inform her that having sworn to sacrifice his life with all its endearing interests to the one set purpose of "revenge," he could no longer dream of marrying her; nevertheless, with love still lingering in his heart, he felt the necessity of seeking a release from her forever in this his last farewell. If cruelty there be, it is beyond his remedy. He hopes, however, that his mental aberration, which she supposes real, may soften the blow; and to aid therein, he enters upon a self-depreciation which recalls the scene in Macbeth, where Malcolm, to test the fidelity of Macduff, accuses himself of manifold misdeeds which should debar him from the throne:

"Justice, verity, temperance, stableness,
Bounty, perseverance, mercy, lowliness,
Devotion, patience, courage, fortitude,
I have no relish of them, but abound
In the division of each several crime,
Acting in many ways."

In a similar strain, Hamlet, in the hope of showing his unworthiness of her, and that in losing him she has lost a thing of little worth, proceeds to defame himself by professing to be indifferently honest, proud, revengeful, ambitious, with more offences at his back than he has thoughts to put them in, or imagination to give them shape, or time to act them in. In all this there is, moreover, an ironical allusion to the slanderous charges uttered against him by her father and Laertes. If he cannot trust himself; if she cannot believe his vows; if virtue cannot so perfect our fallen nature as to

extinguish its relish for evil, how can she have faith in him, the son of his mother? We are all arrant knaves, believe none of us. Get thee gone! Seek a safe refuge from a wicked world. Get thee to a nunnery.

A LITTLE LIE

After these words, he hastens away, but, turning suddenly and glancing back, he catches a glimpse of the peeping Polonius. Though strong suspicions, which had hitherto ruled his mind, now give way to absolute certainty, still uncertainty remains concerning Ophelia's complicity in the contemptible plot. Before condemning her as an accomplice, he will put her to the plain proof; accordingly, he rushes back in wild excitement, and standing before her, glares searchingly into her eyes, demanding in harsh angry tones, "where's your father?" Ophelia, no doubt, taken completely by surprise, betrays herself by a quick and unconscious glance towards the concealed spies, and then with troubled looks stammers forth the words "at home my lord."

When Ophelia uttered what Professor Dowden calls a little lie, she was, perhaps, unaware that her lover was smarting under a keen sense of wrong, by reason of her present and her former conduct. A little lie may often do much unconscious harm, even as a tiny spark ignites a great conflagration. Her lie is defended by Professor Bradley⁶ who even deems it heroic under the circumstances. In approval, he affirms that if ever an angry lunatic should ask him a question which he could not answer truly without great danger to him and to one of his relations, he hopes that grace would be given him to imitate Ophelia. But the Professor seems to forget that heaven never grants grace in aid of an evil deed. In the given case he could easily avoid a lie by an evasive

⁶ "The Tragedies of Shakespeare", p. 163.

answer. That he approves Ophelia's lie does not justify it. That the end does not justify the means is a moral axiom. Man's actions should conform to the natural law, which is not man-made nor changeable at will. The Professor's approval only shows that his notions are lax where Hamlet's were orthodox. The latter, as a philosopher, knew that the morality of an act depends upon its object, purpose, and circumstances; that if the act be in itself evil, no circumstance nor intention can ever make it good.

Ophelia's falsehood, however, allows of extenuation, and in fact an exception may be taken to the opinion of Professors Dowden and Bradley, because her words were uttered hurriedly and without reflection when, under mental disturbance, she was taken by surprise. Hence, her "little lie" being neither deliberate nor willful was in consequence only apparent or material rather than a formal falsehood; and such an act is not morally imputable. Ophelia, moreover, may be exculpated on the plea of a mental reservation; for to her Polonius seemed as much "at home" in the royal palace as in his own domicile. Nevertheless, her reply was hateful and supremely irritating to Hamlet, not because it implied a falsehood, not because she tried to deceive him, but because it unmasked her false position in which by a pious imposture with prayer book in hand, she conspired to betray him to his enemy; such treachery seemed to disclose a lack of truth, love, and honor.

Ophelia's evident treachery rouses by its painful truth her lover's anger. He has detected her in traitorous alliance with his enemies, who even now are watching for an outbreak of his madness. Her assured duplicity extinguishes for the moment every emotion of affection, opens up the flood-gates of his indignation; and his madness, till now only feigned, presently assumes the proportions of reality. Glancing with

threatening fierceness towards Polonius, he commands in thundering tones of irritation: "Let the doors be shut upon him." His eyes aflame with raging anger at the plot of the criminal, he casts one hurried look upon Ophelia, and departing waves his farewell in a frantic utterance of overpowering pain. Ophelia in affright can only pray:

"O, help him, you sweet heavens!"

His towering passion, however, goads him on to manifest his madness further in the presence of the conspirators, and hastening back, he blazes forth his sense of wrong by invectives which in their vehemence are uttered more for the benefit of his enemies than against the fair but false Ophelia. Once he had prized womanhood in his mother and Ophelia, the two whom alone of women he had ever loved. Both in turn had killed that love; the one by infidelity to his father and by her present shameful life; and the other, by her insincerity and falsehood. Truly, he felt "frailty, thy name is woman." In bitter raillery, he assures her that as his honor has not escaped reproach, so too if she marry, her virtue shall not escape the poisoned shafts of calumny in this contaminated world; and, therefore, again he urges, "get thee to a nunnery." The first utterance of these words was prompted by his own sense of men's wickedness, but now they are spoken from his consciousness of woman's falseness. "If thou wilt marry, marry a fool." You have been conspiring to make me one; but "wise men know what monsters you make of them." "Get thee to a nunnery!" Again he rushes forth in anger, hurling back his "farewell."

Returning for the last time in growing rage, he shoots new darts of irony. The fact that she had deceitfully gone over to the enemy, engenders the fear that he has been deceived in her as in his mother; that her love, which he deemed

simple and sincere, was artful and superficial, and the thought impels him to make scornful reference to the many artifices she employs to render herself more attractive. From these heated satirical invectives which were uttered to convince the eavesdroppers in their notion of his dementia, he now turns his batteries upon them. The secret presence of the hated conspirators lashes him to fury; his words roll out faster and faster, and looking wildly towards the spies, he affirms, there shall be no more marriages at court, neither of himself nor of Ophelia. His eyes now flashing with sinister purpose, he points a threatening finger towards Claudius, and, in reference to his incestuous marriage, exclaims in boisterous force, "those that are married already, all but one shall live." At this, the fierce thought of his bloody "revenge" seizes his mind. In fancy he strikes down the monstrous fratricide, and though he sees himself engulfed in the general ruin, which shall accompany the wreckage of the throne, he would have Ophelia safe in refuge from the impending doom; and, therefore, while finally hurrying away from the painful scene, he again utters the mandate, "get thee to a nunnery!"

It was, under the circumstances, the best and only advice he could give her. A nunnery was her best and only refuge from the impending storm. Destruction for himself and all else around him; but for her the cloister's timely shelter. "There is no telling when the fierce wrath may seize him; when he may shake down the pillars of that guilty palace. But not on her fair head, if he can help it, shall the ruin fall! Since the grave is opening for him, let the convent open for her. Not his, but never another's. Could she not guess? Had she not some shadowy perception of the jealous masculine love, which despite their fell divorce, would wall her from the world, and mark her with the seal of God?"

⁷ George Miles, "Essay on *Hæmlet*".

THE TREATMENT OF OPHELIA

Hamlet leaves the field in triumph, conscious of having outwitted the secret stratagem of the King and his foolish old minister. His extravagant manifestation of anger, which is partly real and partly fictitious, forms the principal argument of those who maintain the theory of real insanity; while others hold it wholly inexcusable and uncalled for. Their assertion might assume the force of an argument, if no exigency were found in the plot to require a violent outburst; but with such an emergency actually arising in the very scene itself, the argument loses its genuine force. This necessity flows from a twofold source; the one, the real offence offered him by Ophelia and her father, and the other, the treachery by which they hoped to entrap him. If then we consider, not only the intent and purpose of his outbreak, which was partly feigned and partly real, but also the strong provocation, his alleged cruelty seems rather apparent than real. All doubt, says Bradley, would probably disappear in a contemporary representation of Hamlet; the actor, instructed by the author, would make it clear to us by looks, tones, gestures, and by-play how far Hamlet's feigned harshness was mingled with real bitterness, and how far it was intended for the eavesdroppers rather than for Ophelia.

The Poet leaves no doubt concerning the reality of the provocation. Hamlet's love for Ophelia was genuine. After the dread revelation of the ghost, he had, however, pledged to erase all memories of the past, "all fond records," even Ophelia's love; because, his life now blasted, and all his hopes and aspirations blighted by the one purpose of his sworn "revenge," he felt that he could no longer dream of linking her fortunes to his own doomed existence. Yet in subsequent reflections on the hopeless shipwreck of his life, the gloomy

clouds which enveloped him were rifted at times, and with a flashing thought came a fond hope that, perhaps from out the floating wreck, he might save one beloved form.

In his changed life with its sole dark purpose, it was clear, he could no longer pursue his courtship of Ophelia; for after weighing and finding her wanting in strength of mind and courage of heart, he dared not even whisper to her his awful secret, nor reveal the cause of his assumed madness. But he had confidently hoped that she would remain true to his love and to her own pledged fidelity. How mortally, therefore, must she have wounded his soul and crushed the fond hope of his heart? In consequence, his love, already weakened by melancholy, was now tinctured with bitterness. Moreover, his violent outbreak was sanctioned by treacherous and involuntary circumstances. The spies had skillfully plotted to catch him in ambush and snatch a secret which he must guard at all hazards, since on its safety depended the success of his sworn "revenge." Hence to block their perfidious design, he must by a manifestation of violent madness confirm their belief in his real dementia. Ophelia, however, does not consider herself cruelly treated. Having accepted her father's opinion, she imagines Hamlet's madness to be real, and to be due to her neglected love. If her lover's words are harsh and wild, she, nevertheless, deems them the utterances of an irresponsible madman; and his love and concern for her, which she sees shining through all his invectives, robs them of seeming and intentional harshness. Throughout the scene she says but little, and that little reveals no sense of hurt or injured feelings. Her words so few, yet expressive of her sympathetic heart, are only piteous prayers to heaven in behalf of her mad noble lover, whom by her docile conduct, she thinks, she has driven to lamentable insanity.

O, WOE IS ME!

Most painful to Ophelia must have been her part in the plot, when she realized its unforeseen fatal issue. To know that in this lone interview with her lover, her father and the King had heard all the dreadful words of Hamlet; to know that she is never to meet him more in private, when she had so much to say in extenuation of her past enforced conduct; to know that she was compelled to meet him in this false and unnatural attitude, to bear all his reproaches and his bitterness at her supposed treachery, without daring to breathe a word in vindication of herself in the hearing of her father and the King: these were oppressive thoughts, which impelled her, when free from observation to give expression to her wretchedness:

“Oph. O, what a noble mind is here o’erthrown!
The courtier’s, soldier’s, scholar’s, eye, tongue, sword;
The expectancy and rose of the fair State,
The glass of fashion and the mould of form,
The observed of all observers, quite, quite down!
And I, of ladies most deject and wretched,
That sucked the honey and his music vows,
Now see that noble and most sovereign reason,
Like sweet bells jangled, out of tune and harsh;
That unmatched form and feature of blown youth
Blasted with ecstasy: O, woe is me,
To have seen what I have seen, see what I see!”

Unlike all other lovers of the Poet’s portrayal, Ophelia appears unique, when studied from the text, and not from interpolations on the modern stage. Hers is not the ardent nature of an Imogen or a Juliet. Their passion of love is scarcely known to her unemotional and still undeveloped nature; and not till later does she seem to know how much she loved the lord Hamlet. Unmindful of self, her thoughts and prayers are all bent on him. So unlike others

in a similar bereavement, she appears unconscious of any pangs of love. No aching throb seems to pain her bosom; no emotional suffering is revealed at the loss of a lover whose intrinsic worth she knew was great, and whose affection for her was strong and ardent. Hence, afflicted more in mind than in heart, her grief is prompted, not so much by the loss of her lover, as from the pity, and sorrow, and sympathy of a dear friend, who mourns the mental ruin of some loved one. Accordingly, her thoughts, far from reflexive, are totally engaged on Hamlet, upon his external qualities, and his present sad condition; and, in consequence, she dilates in mourning upon the loss of the courtier, the soldier, the scholar, the mirror of fashion all these he was, as seen through love's eyes. Though she, who had sucked the honey of his music vows, feels "deject and wretched," it is mainly because she sees the hope and pride of the state, "like sweet bells jangled, out of tune and harsh, blasted with ecstasy" or madness. Her grief seems inspired more by Hamlet's sad affliction of insanity, than by her own loss of her lover.

A NEW STRATAGEM

The unexpected failure of the stratagem was a sore disappointment to the King and his minister. Its effect upon the former was negative, and wholly contrary to what Polonius had desired. If it strengthened the pet theory of the minister, it positively confirmed Claudius in his preexisting suspicion of Hamlet's feigned madness. Hence, on coming forth from the hiding after Hamlet's departure, he exclaims with forceful emphasis, as noted in the original text:⁸

"Love, no, no, that's not the cause,
Some deeper thing, it is that troubles him."

⁸ First Quarto 1603.

This difference of effect was owing to the advantage which the King possessed over his minister. An astute and close observer, Claudius had from the very start suspected that Hamlet was only feigning madness, and feared lest he possessed a knowledge of the secret crime. Hence, with his wits sharpened by anxiety, he was quick to notice that his nephew's words and actions, though lacking a little in coherence, as was natural to a man who was playing madness, were nevertheless, both in form and matter, far from those of a real madman. He considered the question from the side of its practical bearings on his own interests, and concluded that, as far as these are concerned, Hamlet is not mad, but most dangerously sane. His conclusion now assumes almost certainty, in face of the Prince's declaration, "all but one shall live." These words were without meaning for Polonius; but, shot forth in the violence of a maddening triumph, they startled Claudius, because he recognized in them a parting threat, full of significance and of menace to his safety. Hence his guilty soul, at once, overawed by Hamlet's mad violence and open threat, was filled with fear and apprehension. There is, he affirms, in his nephew's melancholy soul some hidden thing on which he broods, and "the hatch no doubt will be some danger." His secret knowledge enables him to suspect the true nature of the danger, and this suspicion prompts him to immediate action.

A man like Claudius, rich in experience and quick in resolve, determined without delay upon a plan that would rid himself and Denmark of the Prince's presence. It was a specious plan. The Danes, the masters of the sea, were at that period accustomed to invade England at intervals unto great destruction, until its people in their helplessness, had in fine decided to stay these hostile incursions by a voluntary payment of an annual tribute. This tax, which of late years

remained unpaid, afforded the King a ready pretext to send Hamlet on an embassy for its collection. There is nothing at this point, to justify the idea that Claudius had already hatched the plot to murder the Prince by royal proxy in England. His sole thought, for the present, is centered in the hope that foreign travel with its varied scenes and climate, may rift the clouds of melancholy that darken the Prince's moody brain. If this prove fruitless, he sees in the absence of his nephew a riddance of present danger and a gaining of time to think of other safeguards against his dangerous lunacy. At this juncture, Ophelia approaches and Polonius in surprise at her sad plight exclaims, "How now, Ophelia!" She had come forth from the ordeal with evident signs of distress: her flushed face, troubled mien, and utter dejection of spirits, plainly told her sufferings of mind and heart.

If Polonius was puzzled, he was still more chagrined at the collapse of his vaunted plan. Having confidently assured the King that the "espials" would prove the correctness of his theory concerning Hamlet's madness, and having boastfully staked his reputation upon its success, he naturally felt a keen disappointment. If the failure seemed to Claudius, to prove beyond doubt the hollowness of the old man's theory, Polonius, under the influence of his imaginary infallibility of judgment, still tenaciously adhered to his discredited opinions. Hence while diplomatically approving the King's new project, he is unwilling to admit his error, and in unshaken assurance proposes a new scheme to attest the soundness of his judgment.

His new design, as shady as the former, is but another sample of his boasted diplomacy, "by indirection to find direction out." The senile intriguer, who gloried in a statecraft founded in the main on a system of espionage and eavesdrop-

ping, was so long addicted to cunning ways and devious paths that he became a victim of suspicion; and this mental trait destroyed his confidence in human nature, even in his own children. His son, he discredited by spying on his life in Paris; Ophelia, he scarcely trusted beyond his presence; and in his new plot, he cannot rely upon the fidelity of the Queen. Hence he urges the King to insist that she exercise her just parental authority in the interview to be prearranged between herself and Hamlet. He was wont to do the same, as we have seen, when he browbeat Ophelia into a confession of her love affair. In like manner the Queen-mother must be urged to use her full authority in all severity. If she be outspoken with her son; if she be severe, peremptory, and bold, and speak in plain, unmincing words, she may root from his heart the secret of his melancholy malady. Furthermore, in mistrust of the mother, lest, under the influence of maternal affection, she may fail to report the interview aright, he assures the King that he himself, unknown to them, will, from his concealment in the Queen's boudoir, overhear all that passes, and report in full and correctly to his royal highness. Claudius agrees to the project, and, while postponing for a time his design of Hamlet's embassy to England, decides to redouble his vigilance:

“Madness in great ones must not unwatched go.”

SCENE SECOND

The transition from the last scene of tumultuous raging passion to the present, in which the Prince appears a judicious critic, self-possessed, and in perfect equanimity of mind, reveals a new and surprising trait of his character. If he is pictured as suddenly passing from the whirlwind of passion to a perfect calm, in which his instruction to the Players, discloses him keen of judgment and an admirable critic of the dramatic art; if at this trying moment, when the assured triumph of his plot arouses him to the highest nervous and mental strain, he is, nevertheless, pictured in perfect repression of feelings, as interesting himself in the minutiae of the player's art, and in manifesting by private conversation his strong affection for Horatio; if while awaiting the opening of the Play, he is seen, in presence of the assembled court, to adapt himself readily to every character, whether friend or foe, revealing to the former his sanity and to the latter his feigned madness, now irritating the King by his ironical shafts, now exposing Polonius to ridicule, now tantalizing Ophelia, and now turning aside to discourse sanely with Horatio; all seems done for the express purpose of affording by this luminous contrast to his former violent outburst, sufficient evidence to guard us against the mistaken notion that he is in reality dethroned in reason.

IDENTIFIED WITH HAMLET

Shakespeare's natural pride in the dramatic art, leads him to identify himself with Hamlet at the opening of the present scene. He portrays the Prince as a man of rare mental attainments, cultivated tastes, and a lover and patron of

the drama. By sketching in his instruction to the Players, the essential laws which should govern every impersonation, and by decrying the manifold evils which infested the stage of his day, he discloses his own high ideals of the histrionic art. He insists upon distinctness of utterance and a naturalness of action in harmony with the thought expressed. He demands a spirit of truthfulness and simplicity which, safeguarding the actor against overstepping "the modesty of nature," will save him from arrogance in overdoing his character, and from diffidence in reaching the required elevation. His supreme norm is simplicity and fidelity to truth. The purpose of his art is "to show virtue her own features, and scorn, her own image."

By these words, Shakespeare, who speaks in the person of Hamlet, is far from advocating the realism, which, without the idealization of art, reproduces with exactness upon our modern stage human life in all its vulgarities. Such license is an abuse of the histrionic art, and necessarily leads to evil in the deterioration of morals. True to the real, to the ideal art, he himself "holds the mirror up to nature." He reflects to our mental vision, by means of vivid representation, human life and action in its varied purposes and motive powers, its virtues and opposing vices, their origin and nature, their growth and fruit, with the view of revealing the important truth that man is not a slave of circumstances, nor of chance, nor of inexorable fate; but a free agent, the creator of his own character, and the arbiter of his own destiny. If he rationally conform his life to the natural and moral law, it will lead him to virtue and to unfailing reward; but if, ignoring or defying the same law, he pursue evil, he shall inevitably find an avenging Nemesis following on his trail. This, in the mind of the Poet, is the noble purpose of the dramatic art, a purpose which endows it with a lasting

interest and a power incalculable for good; and to this noble purpose, Shakespeare has unfailingly adhered beyond all dramatists of his own and of later times.

From his instruction to the Players we may safely conclude what sort of an actor was Shakespeare himself. Though tradition says that he played but secondary parts, such as the King, and the Ghost in *Hamlet*, and old Adam in *As You Like It*, it was, we may suppose, not only from pure good nature, but also because of other important labors which taxed his time in the composition and rehearsal of his dramas. There is no reason to doubt that he was an excellent actor, but too quick, simple, and natural to please a vitiated popular taste which demanded loudness, bombastic action, declamation, and exaggeration, all characteristics still too common on the public stage.

Garriek more than any other man was an actor according to Shakespeare's own heart; but Partridge who was a fair representative of the popular feeling of his day, says he was "too simple, natural, and affecting." Anybody might act Hamlet like him. In the Poet's time no less than in our own, the popular taste hungered after what it did not see in life, — "just as the chambermaids and middle classes of to-day," says Story, "like novels of high life, and ghostly adventures, and sensational incidents." Comedy is too often turned into farce, and tragedy into rant, and what is called elocution or an artificial intonation and pronunciation such as no human being in his senses would use in daily life.

With reason, therefore, Shakespeare lays down certain negative laws on which he dwells even more than on those of the positive order; and launches stinging invectives against abuses which tend to degrade the drama and to depreciate it in the eyes of the judicious. The "robustious periwig-pated fellows" were the "termagants" and "Herods," who tore a

passion to tatters, and who in accents neither Christian nor pagan strutted and bellowed in their abominable imitations of "humanity." "Termagant," a god of the Saracens, was a character common to the romances and plays of the middle ages. He was a familiar stock personage, unvaryingly bloody and riotous of nature, and an implacable demon of fire and sword. Similarly, Herod was an unfailing favorite of the same dramas. In *The Murder of the Innocents*, the most popular of the Mystery Plays, he was regularly characterized as a bloody tyrant, monstrous in pride, and a blustering braggart raving in furious bombast.

Though the Mysteries were distinct from the Miracle dramas, they were at times interwoven one with the other. The Mysteries were founded on the historical parts of the Old and New Testament, while the Miracle Plays were based either on legendary subjects, or on the lives of the saints. Originating in the Church, they were designed as an efficacious means of instructing the masses in the truths and mysteries of religion, and were enacted at first by clerics and choristers. Dating back as far as recorded to the twelfth century, their popularity had become so wide-spread that pious confraternities were organized in every town for their proper performance. As long as they remained under the tutelage of the Church, they retained their original character, but later, falling into the hands of laymen and exhibited in public squares, simply as means of popular amusement, they lost their prime purpose, and, taking on new elements, degenerated into burlesque and buffooneries, and often into irreverences, with the consequence that in their merited disrepute, they no longer held the respect of the better class, and came under the ban of religion.

From these Mystery and Miracle Plays were evolved another class of religious dramas, commonly known as "Mor-

alities." More perfect in nature and more artistic in structure, they consisted of allegories, in which human virtues and vices were personified in action. They were in vogue as late as the time of Elizabeth, and the Poet himself must have witnessed many of them at Stratford, and, taking part in them, have become aware of his love and taste for the stage. These Moralities were efficient precursors of the modern drama, which, originating in rude comedy and tragedy about the middle of the sixteenth century, Shakespeare brought to perfection before the close of the same. This new-born drama, inheriting many crudities and extravagances from the Moralities, had its "Termagants," and "Herods," and clowns, to excite the laughter of groundlings. The written drama was often interpolated with extemporaneous efforts of the actor, and the serious action and progress of a tragedy were not unfrequently halted by low buffoonery; for comedians were ever ready to exhibit their wit in combats with any personage of the audience. Against these crying abuses, the Poet was inexorable, and in the person of Hamlet, pronounces in just anger their utter condemnation.

A SECRET INTERVIEW

At the entrance of Polonius and the young spies, who are ever officiously intruding themselves upon him, Hamlet suddenly terminates his instruction to the Players. To rid himself of his unwelcome visitors, he sends them on an idle errand, and hails Horatio. In the interview which almost follows on the heels of the violent outbreak against Ophelia, he reveals by contrast the amiable side of his character, in a touching manifestation of devotion and strong affection for his one trusted friend. By nature capable of strong friendship, he was keenly sensitive to his isolation, and longed for companionship. He was loath to mingle in the repugnant

life of a degenerated court, whose Queen had lost his respect and confidence, and whose hated King, suspicious and treacherous, was with his sycophantic ministers and spies always on the alert against him. Ophelia's late disclosure of want of integrity, and of mental capacity to grasp the meaning of the visible distress and tumult of his soul, had compelled him in distrust and soreness of heart to turn from her, the one woman whom he yet sincerely loved, and on whose fidelity he had confidently counted. Hence, thrown back upon himself, and ruminating in melancholy mood upon the frailty of human nature, and the evils dominant in social life around him, he felt like a solitary wanderer in a foreign land, or again fancied himself a floating wreck adrift upon the roaring waters, where, amid the deepening gloom, he saw no star of hope to guide him, nor haven to invite his wave-worn bark.

A sense of utter loneliness turns him, athirst for friendship, to the brave and true Horatio. In him he seeks a refuge from the tempest raging within his soul. How in seclusion he outpours with grateful feeling his mind and heart to his sturdy friend of tranquil mind and even temper! How glowingly he admires Horatio's noble qualities so opposite to his own! With genuine pleasure, he dilates upon his serenity, his vigor, and unfailing constancy of friendship. As a weary wanderer in a desert wild, he finds in him a veritable oasis, where gloom gives way to sunshine; where distress of soul finds comfort; and where an aromatic balm soothes his pained heart and feelings. Strong is his delight in the one sole friend, whose fidelity has the sterling ring of an unadulterated coin. In him at least he finds a man "whose blood and judgment are so well commingled that they are not a pipe for fortune's finger to sound what stop she please." Such a friend is Horatio, and he promises to wear him in his inmost heart, aye, and grapple and bind him to his soul "with hoops

of steel." When Horatio, in his usual modesty and diffidence of self, manifests surprise at Hamlet's high encomium and warm appreciation of his friendship, the Prince, with the intent of proving that his utterances are guileless, and unexaggerated, and sincere, gives us a beautiful exposition of his friend's character.

By this private interview with Horatio, Hamlet reveals his purpose of having the play performed before the King. The subjective school, which ascribes to the Prince an habitual procrastination, because of weakness of will, is wont to assume that the play, as well as his doubts concerning the nature and veracity of the ghost, are but makeshifts to excuse his delay in the duty of "revenge." Such criticism ignores the fact which Shakespeare so much insists upon, that Hamlet is a very religious man, most keen of conscience, who would not even dream of committing a doubtful murder. This characteristic is in the eyes of the Poet so important for the proper understanding of the drama that, lest we forget it, he dwells upon it again for the third time. Hamlet's delay is prompted, not indeed by the spirit of procrastination, but by most sane reasons which he states to Horatio. As a Christian, he explains that the ghostly visitor may be "a damned ghost," a soul sentenced for its wickedness to damnation, or again a fallen angel, or evil spirit intent in either case upon leading him to crime. The command of the ghost, which seems so wicked, offers in itself every probability that it is a spirit of hell. Hamlet, therefore, hesitates to obey before he has solved his most reasonable doubt, and to solve it, he has arduously prepared a mock tragedy, by which he hopes to unmask the supposed "occult guilt of Claudius." Summoning his trusted friend, before the opening of the play, he discloses the design, and seeks his prudent aid. Though after the interview with the ghost, he had declined to gratify the

curiosity of Horatio, he seems later to have shared with him at least that part of the secret which involved his uncle's crime. Hence relying now upon his friend's known prudent judgment, he earnestly entreats him to watch the King during the critical moment of the play, to rivet his eyes upon his countenance, and note his action, so that, by comparing judgments later, they may come more readily to some safe conclusion concerning his innocence or guilt.

THE ENTRANCE OF THE ROYAL PARTY

The dialogue is suddenly terminated by a flourish of trumpets, which announces the approach of the royal party. As the King and Queen enter the reception hall to the music of a Danish march, Hamlet hurriedly cautions his friend to choose a fitting position for observation, while he himself resumes at once his usual "antic disposition," and supports it with a reckless levity throughout the scene. This sudden passing from his discourse with Horatio, which is so admirable and remarkable for its sanity, to heedless frivolity in word and action, is another index which points to the fact that the Prince is only feigning madness. To strengthen the belief the Poet causes Hamlet to say in confidence to the friend, who alone is aware of the true situation, "They are coming to the play; I must be idle." I must assume a foolishness; play light-headedness, or madness.

This playing the fool with dexterity and enacting in perfect sanity the role of a madman, was not only easy for a man of superb mental attainments, who is portrayed as a master of the dramatic art, moving among players and himself often enacting a part; but it was also a means of pleasure and amusement and, in his present situation, of the greatest advantage; for thus masked, he could lead on the King, give

free play to his wit and irony, and so relieve his irritated mind and pent-up feelings.

While in the presence of the court, awaiting the opening of the play, Hamlet adapts himself, as usual, to the thoughts and suspicions of each of the characters with whom he converses. When in an indulgent tone and terms of good will, Claudius asks: "How fares our cousin Hamlet?" The latter playing upon the equivocal term "fare," replies irrelevantly, and his words of enigma and of irony, uttered in a frivolous strain before the courtiers, seem couched in disrespect to Claudius. He lives, affirms the Prince, like the chameleon, an animal which, because of its ability to live long without food, is popularly supposed to exist on air. He too, "promised crammed" lives on promises, empty and thin as air. His allusion is, no doubt, to the King's promise to treat him with all kindness, to consider him as his own son, and to make him heir to the throne. Whether or not Claudius recognized in Hamlet's words an expression of disappointed ambition and a veiled charge of unfaithfulness to promises, he, nevertheless, considered them uncourteous and offensive, and replies in unwonted acerbity. But, heedless of the words of the perplexed King, Hamlet ignores him, and, suddenly turning away in disdain, gives his attention to Polonius.

Always delighting in the entanglement of the old minister, he now begins to toy with him, and in a few telling words, to expose him to the ridicule of the whole court. The vanity of the boastful diplomat is displayed in his bragging of the part which he took in a play at the university, where he was reputed a good actor. When Hamlet inquires what character he enacted, Polonius replies in his usual vaunting mood: "I did enact Julius Caesar; I was killed in the Capitol; Brutus killed me." Then, rejoins the Prince, "it was a brute part of

Brutus to kill so capital a calf." At this sally all are compelled to laugh in merriment.

The Queen, however, comes to the rescue. To silence the biting wit of her son, for whom in his supposed mental affliction, she feels a motherly affection, she presses him to come and sit beside her. He declines the invitation and, to confirm Polonius in his false theory, addresses Ophelia in mock gallantry, and takes a position near her. The ruse was successful; for at once her father remarks in confidence to the King: "O, ho! do you mark that?" It is, he is sure, another proof of his fond hypothesis.

Though Ophelia is of little concern to Hamlet at the present moment, engrossed as he is in his soul's all-absorbing purpose of catching the conscience of the King, he takes the position, because it is the best vantage ground from which to scan the countenance of Claudius during the critical action of the play. If Ophelia thinks Hamlet merry, it is a merriment assumed to conceal from her and the court his anxious purpose. In irony he asks why should he not be merry, when four months after his father's death, his mother can be so gay and cheerful. Since the Queen and court have spurned the accustomed period of royal mourning, he will also doff his suit of black, don a gay attire, and become a maker of ballads, as more befitting his surroundings. There is yet hope that a man's memory may outlive him by half a year; but even then "by our Lady" (Blessed Mary, the Virgin Mother) he must build churches, or else suffer the fate of the hobby-horse, whose epitaph is, "For, O, for, O, the hobby-horse is forgot."

These words form the first line of a ballad written by some wag of the time, and relate to the Reformers' suppression of the May-games and Morris-dancers in which the hobby-horse was a prominent character. It is again alluded to in *Love's Labor Lost*. The hobby-horse of the May-games, says

Knight, required a person of considerable skill to manage him, although his body was only of wicker-work and his head and neck of pasteboard. The animal was considered so dangerous by the Puritans that, exerting all their power, they successfully banished him from the May-games. The people, however, clung to him with wonderful pertinacity; and it is most probably for this reason that when an individual cherishes a small piece of folly, which he is unwilling to give up, it is called his hobby-horse.

A PROLOGUE

The players, a king and queen, now enter, and enact a dumb show. Like an olden prologue, it is designed to explain the main action of the tragedy. This introductory pantomime, common to old court plays of England, was also a favorite on the Danish stage, and is known to have survived as late as the seventeenth century. In the present instance, the silent players briefly reveal by mimic action the barest outlines of the plot or argument. Upon a king asleep on a bank of flowers, steals a murderer, who pours poison in his ears and noiselessly departs. The queen, who is in collusion with the murderer, enters, and, followed by the poisoner and other mutes, makes much ado with them in passionate action over the dead body of the king. The pantomime closes with the murderer winning, after a brief wooing, the heart of the queen.

The dumb-show proves a dark puzzle to Ophelia, and, therefore, Hamlet informs her that it is "miching mallecho," which she understands to mean a hidden wickedness, or secret crime, and so it truly is in a double sense; for the mock tragedy is designed to reveal not only the Prince's secret plot, but also the secret crime of Claudius. As the prologue opens, he further assures her that she shall learn all from the players, because from the very nature of their art, they can keep no

secrets. For while dramatic art supposes players, shut out from the outer world, to be wholly engaged in conversation with each other, with no intruder to hear their words or see their actions, they are, in fact, all in the face of an audience, which cannot fail to see their every act, and hear their most confidential secrets.

Hamlet is soon wholly distracted from the presence of Ophelia, because, with eyes intently fixed upon the King, his mind is entirely engrossed in watching his movements. Hence he is listless, and his few replies, if thoughtless and irrelevant, serve to hide his secret purpose and the terrible anxiety which riots in his expectant soul.

THE MOUSE TRAP

Heedless of Ophelia's gentle reprehension, Hamlet utters a caustic jest in allusion to their former love, and lapses into silence at the entrance of the Player-king and queen. The dialogue, he hopes will awaken in his mother the memory of her former life of love and faithfulness. An honored life of thirty years of wedded happiness should cause her to realize its contrast to her present shameful guilty state. The Player-king, in serious illness, is conscious of his waning powers, and expresses a presentiment that his sands of life are nearly run. He, however, assures the Player-queen that, loved and honored, she, perhaps, may find another husband as loving and as true. The Player-queen with passionate impulse energetically protests against his words, because they seem to argue treason in her heart; and, in order to confirm her loyal love, calls down curses on her head, if she ever wed again, affirming that "none wed the second (husband) but who kill the first." Uneasy and visibly affected by these telltale words, Gertrude casts an inquiring glance at Hamlet, who with eyes intently fixed upon her countenance, is anxiously watching to catch in

her troubled looks and flushing face even the faintest flash by which he may see her guilty conscience unwillingly revealed. Reading upon her face the handwriting of her troubled thoughts, he gives them expression with telling force, when with eyes piercing her very soul, he mutters in burning words audible to her, "wormwood! wormwood!"

After this sudden and brief interruption, the Player-king proceeds to assure his consort that, while now admitting the truth of her words and her present firm resolve to live in perpetual widowhood, nevertheless, relying on his knowledge of the fickleness of the human heart and the natural instability of human resolutions, he still cannot help but think that, under changed circumstances, she too will change her mind; for our fates often running contrary to our wills, leave us our resolves, but frustrate their fulfilment. Hence, he concludes by affirming that, though she now swear never to wed a second husband, this resolve shall die when her "first lord is dead."

The Player-queen, in response, swears to the eternal loyalty of her love and the infrangibility of her resolve. In proof whereof, she neither hesitates to invoke many curses and imprecations on herself, nor to pray Heaven to let eternal strife pursue her, both here and in the world to come, if, once a widow, she ever be a wife again. These words as Hamlet perceives, strongly affect his mother, and in steady gaze he watches her disturbed feelings, which he further irritates by the terrible irony of his accusing words, "if she should break it now!"

Ignoring Claudius throughout the dialogue, Hamlet had centered his attention wholly upon Gertrude. Though the ghost had revealed the fact that she had been faithless to his father; that, while counterfeiting the sincerest affection, she had yielded to the illicit love of his seducing uncle, he was still unaware of the extent of her guilt: whether she had ac-

tively or passively countenanced the murder, or whether in full innocence of the foul crime, she had contracted an incestuous marriage with the murderer. Having learned from her troubled looks and restlessness, that she recognized herself in the Player-queen, he now suddenly turns upon her and startles her by the suddenness and vehemence of his sarcastic question, "Madam, how like you this play?" His question was a shaft barbed with bitter irony, which quickened the memory of her infidelity to his loving father. Gertrude in surprise, falters for the moment at the fierce utterance, only to reply, "The lady doth protest too much, methinks." These telltale words of covered guilt prove that she has recognized in the Player-queen her own faithless love; and Hamlet, mindful of her disdain to mourn the memory of his honored father and of her shameful hasty marriage, shoots another shaft steeped in ridicule and raillery, in the words "O, but she'll keep her word."

Claudius, too, in guilty conscience takes alarm. During the introductory pantomime, he had been distracted partly by the loquacious Polonius, and partly by Hamlet's attention to Ophelia. Hence, he did not notice the silent actors in their dumb and brief portrayal of the plot. He had since, however, heard enough of the dialogue of the Player-king and queen to sniff offense; Gertrude's evident disturbance at the pointed reference to the Player-queen's hasty marriage with her criminal paramour inspired a fear lest there be a further design to unkennel the secret of his soul. This is manifest from his eager questions and demand to know the plot before the play proceeds. Hamlet in a light and airy mood assures him, that, as all is done with merriment and jest, there can be no possible offense. Nevertheless, from anxiety of mind, he fears lest Claudius, who seems alarmed by suspicions, may interrupt the play before the enactment of the poisoning scene, and so thwart his

well laid plot. Hence his ingenuity is supremely taxed. He must at once disarm the King of his suspicions and his fears, and detain him *nolens volens* to the end. He is equal to the task, and when Claudius, manifestly worried and still unassured, gruffly demands the name of the play, the Prince in playful satire replies in enigmatic words, "The Mousetrap."

With a deep penetration of the wily character of his uncle, Hamlet relies on one bold, but successful stroke. He braves the King, and shames him, and in defiance challenges him to interrupt the play at the risk of a public confession of his guilt. The interlude, he says is but the image of a murder done long long ago in a foreign land, and though the knavish crime be heinous, why should his royal highness, whose soul is stainless as his own, fear its re-enactment. Such a play, if it make the guilty wince, will leave the innocent unaffected. His defiant ruse triumphs; and Claudius unwillingly remains to see the play continued.

ENTRAPPED

As the play proceeds, the approaching crisis rouses Hamlet to the greatest nervous tension. With glowing mind and throbbing heart, he fiercely struggles to repress wild emotions, which, if manifested at this critical moment, might terminate the play before Lucianus enters to speak his sixteen lines. His eyes rigidly fixed upon the uneasy King, his attention, all absorbed by his overmastering purpose, is not distracted for an instant even by the words of Ophelia. If he speak to her at all, it is to ease the tumult of his thoughts and, under the mask of an assumed indifference and calm, to bridge over the moments of intense suspense while awaiting the expected climax when he may release his pent-up thoughts and feelings.

His first reply to Ophelia, in words cynical and half ambiguous, is an allusion to their former love, and must have

proved an unwelcome, if not a bitter jest. His unseemly language is prompted, not only by his wish to impress upon her and others the reality of his madness, but also by the bitter feeling which arises from his knowledge of her shallow and imperfect love. From her weakness of character, he has come to consider her scarcely more than a puppet, or "image" controlled by a string in the hand of an old dotard. In his last reply, he tells her she must take her husband for better for worse, words which refer to the Catholic Ritual of sacramental marriage. This sacrament, which bars every notion of possible divorce, is entered into by the contracting parties, when each in turn makes before God the following solemn and religious vow: "I promise to take thee for my lawful wife (husband) to have and to hold from this day forward, *for better for worse*, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, till death do us part." These words were in part changed in the new ritual of the State Church of Shakespeare's day.

At the entrance of Lucianus, the poisoner, Hamlet's nervous tension reaches the extreme. The sight of the actor, wasting time in tragic attitudes and horrid mien, overtaxes his patience. He commands him to proceed to action, at the same time giving him the cue to the momentous lines, which, for the clear circumstantial portrayal of the crime of Claudius, he himself had inserted in the interlude. While Lucianus pours the poison in the ears of the sleeping king, Hamlet with the intent of heightening its effect, suddenly leaps forward, and, with gaze fixed on Claudius, points at him, while exclaiming in tremulous excitement and impassioned words: "he poisons him in the garden for his crown! You shall see anon how the murderer wins the love of the queen!"

Claudius in a daze, as if struck by some unseen hand, rises hastily in wild bewilderment, and with manifest affright cuts short the lines of Lucianus. At his action, Hamlet thunders in

fierce sarcastic tones, "What, frightened with false fire!" The Queen from anxious concern inquires, "How fares my lord?" The courtiers supposing Claudius the victim of some sudden malady, crowd about him, and Polonius hastily shambles forward, and, with excited words and gestures, commands the players to cease the performance.

At the sight of his crime revealed in every circumstance and of the feverish excitement of Hamlet, whose words with wild gesticulation forced upon his attention each secret detail, Claudius feels the mask torn from his face, and stands revealed a criminal, a horrid fratricide, and usurper of the throne. Surprised and appalled at his exposure, like Macbeth at the sight of Banquo's ghost, he struggles with a fearful riot in his soul. In quick succession, shame, fear, horror, anger, and despair with rushing tumult rack his heart, confuse his mind, rob him of speech and un-man his trembling swaying form. Around him all seems dark as the blackness of his soul, and groping helplessly about, his repeated cry for light is echoed by the courtiers, who, while shouting amid disorder for lights, lights, hurry away the conscience-stricken man to his private apartments. As the Queen remained unaffected by the poisoning scene, it may be reasonably supposed that she was ignorant of her husband's murder .

COME, SOME MUSIC!

As the King is led away in a sense of overpowering confusion, Hamlet looks after him and sings aloud snatches of an old song: "Why, let the stricken deer go weep." He feels the impulse of murder in his heart, and breaks out in loud, ironical laughter, which, ringing in cruel echoes through the hall, falls with accusing terror on the ears of the retreating criminal.

Again alone with Horatio, Hamlet, of pensive nature or-

dinarily so calm and self-controlled, revels in unrestrained joy and merriment. A very recent critic who follows the theory of Hamlet's real dementia, sees in his present conduct

“The most striking of all the examples of his madness. Hamlet was now pretty mad. As in similar circumstances in Act I. reaction was marked by ‘wild and whirling words,’ an antic disposition, and insane frivolity, precisely so was it on the present occasion.” *Trench's Commentary on Hamlet.*

Such criticism mistakes small things for great, a molehill for a mountain. It may be justified by certain erratic representations on the stage, which are employed to heighten dramatic effect and to amuse the popular fancy; but it is unsupported by Shakespeare's text. The two scenes present the greatest disparity in action and circumstances. In the one, after the appearance of the ghost and its appalling revelations, Hamlet assumed an ‘antic disposition,’ used ‘wild and whirling words,’ and indulged in ‘insane frivolity’ for the purpose of concealing from Horatio his terrible oppression of mind and heart; in the other, he is neither mad in the sense of angry, nor mad in the sense of insane, but joyous and mirthful; and these sentiments never drive men mad, nor are they characteristics of dementia. His feelings are natural and not feigned, and are shared by Horatio, who understands him; for his words are not ‘wild and whirling,’ but very sane and pertinent. A sudden exultation of heart at his signal triumph in unkenning the secret crime of Claudius, unshackles his long pent-up feelings, and in the reaction he naturally indulges his joyous mood, and yields to extravagant mirth and playfulness, as a boy who, when released from the mental tension and restraints of school, frisks, shouts, and gambols in wanton gayety from the very joy of his recovered freedom.

First, Hamlet naturally manifests an elation of mind at the signal triumph of his dramatic stratagem. The play, he

says, proves that, if fortune, like a Turk, should ever turn against him, he may well, as a born actor, claim fellowship with professional artists. Next, in playful mood, a Pythias, he sings to Damon how his Jove-father was supplanted, not by an ass, but worse, by a very "pajock." The peacock was by common opinion, in Shakespeare's day, a bird of evil repute. "Its head was the head of a serpent, its voice was the voice of a fiend, and its pace, the stealth of a thief." In popular works of natural history, it was pictured as uniting in itself the worst passions, inordinate pride and envy, and unnatural cruelty and lust. Hence, it has been affirmed that in the whole fauna of the time, Hamlet could not have selected the name of a bird or beast that expressed with greater emphasis the hated union of corrupt passions and evil life in the man that usurped the throne of Denmark. Hamlet now, no longer doubts the crime of Claudius, and, rejoicing in his discovery, lays a wager in merriment on the veracity of the ghost:

"O good Horatio, I'll take the ghost's word for a thousand pound."¹⁰ Conscious of his exaltation of mind and highly excited feelings, he calls for music to soothe to rest the tumult of overwrought emotions:

"Ah, ha! Come, some music! Come, the recorders!"

AN URGENT MESSAGE

If the King at the poisoning scene was, unlike Macbeth, preserved by prudent cunning from fatal words of self-confession, it was due to his greater skill of hypocrisy; but, when alone with the Queen in his private apartments, he throws aside the mask, and yields to an unrestrained outbreak of his

¹⁰ In the original text we read:

"Aye, Horatio, I'll take the ghost's word
For more than all the coin in Denmark".

feelings of anger and chagrin. Raving in distempered fury at Hamlet, at his own foolhardy leniency in dealing with a madman, and, berating even his consort for her indulgent negligence in watching over her stricken son, he commands her to seek him at once, and, in a maternal but energetic interview, to impose restraints upon him. For this effect the Queen commissions Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to summon Hamlet to meet her that very night in private audience, and to give an explanation of his strange and unpardonable conduct.

The entrance of these messengers and quondam friends, but now royal spies, produces a sudden change in Hamlet. Like a blighting blast, their very presence suddenly congeals the warmth of his mirthful and boisterous mood into a frozen reserve, tinctured by a partially concealed disdain and scorn. Seeing these representatives and willing tools of a bloody criminal, clothed in the traitorous guise of friendship, daily pestering him by their espionage with the hope of worming out his secret, he greets them with a chilling air, and answers them in open raillery. The trialogue is a literary masterpiece in which every word of the Prince falls with the "sweep of an archangel's sword." When needlessly informed of the King's "marvellous distemper," he replies in scorn, that, if the King's distemper needs purgation, they exhibit great folly in summoning him rather than a physician: if he be called to diagnose his distemper he will prescribe a further purgation that will throw him into a worse choleric state. The irrepressible pair find these words unintelligible.

"I entreat you to speak less wildly," says Guildenstern in irritated feelings.

"I am tame, sir," replies Hamlet in mock deference, "proceed."

As soon as they announce their mission from his mother, who is in sore affliction, he receives them with a display of

princely courtesy, and greets them with words whose tone clearly reveals an ironical welcome. In vexation they protest against this courtesy. "It is not," they say, "of the right breed. If you give us not a wholesome answer, we shall end the business."

Hamlet, playing upon their words, expresses surprise: "How is it that you expect a wholesome or sane reply from a man whose mind you know is diseased?" Then suddenly turning upon them, he sharply questions in disdainful words, which clearly unmask their hireling trade: "You come from my mother, then no more! but to the point, what says she?"

"She says, your behavior has struck her with wonder and astonishment."

"O, wonderful son," cries Hamlet, "that can so astonish a mother! But speak, what is the sequel of this mother's astonishment? Come, impart!"

"She desires," replies Guildenstern, "to speak with you before you go to bed."

"We shall obey her," exclaimed the Prince, "with no less alacrity, than if she were ten times our mother." And in impatience he tartly demands, "Have you any further trade with us?"

Evidently, the bond of affection that existed between them in their life at school, is shattered; and from the ashes of the dead friendship Hamlet feels arising an antipathy, which is fast growing into abhorrence and even into actual hostility. Aware of his open displeasure, the courtiers deem it opportune to appeal to the memory of his former love. His reply is a jesting allusion to the catechism of the State Church, by which he intends to avow, rather than to conceal his feeling, that he is using his tongue in a way forbidden, as much "as picking and stealing" are forbidden to the hands. Under the cover of friendship, they injudiciously continue

to prod him to disclose the cause of his distemper, assuring him that failure to share his grief with friends, will certainly force the King to bar the door upon his liberty. Deftly falling in with their suspicions, Hamlet assigns the loss of the crown as the cause of his grief, a cause, which, though the least of his wrongs, they will best understand:

“How can that be?” asks Rosencrantz in surprise, “Have you not the King’s own word for your succession in Denmark?”

“Ay, Ay, Sir,” retorts Hamlet, “but know you not the musty proverb: ‘Whilst grass doth grow, oft starves the silly steed.’ ”

EASY AS LYING

The entrance of the musicians interrupts the dialogue, and leaves the royal emissaries baffled in the attempt to penetrate Hamlet’s guise, and to fan his chilling reserve into glowing warmth. Though roused all the while to extreme irritation by the scarcely concealed purpose of his traitorous friends, the Prince had muffled his feelings, and, while preserving an exterior calm, had treated them with the mock gravity of princely courtesy. But now his demeanor is changed. He turns in glad relief to give the musicians a hearty welcome. Taking one of their instruments, he sharply addresses Guildenstern: “Come apart, sir, I would have a word or two with you in private.” Of the two spies, he had been the most offensively forward and insistent on forcing himself on Hamlet, and, therefore, the latter, in utmost resentment, plies him with galling interrogatories: “Why do you go about, pursuing me like an animal in the chase? Why are you ever bent on getting to the windward of me, as if to drive me into a snare?”

Surprised as well as abashed at his heated words of expostulation, Guildenstern feels conscious of his offense, but

in courtly style pleads great love as an excuse for his unwelcome boldness. Hamlet, however, penetrates his hypocrisy and sees the falsehood. The flute which he holds he now presses upon the unwilling courtier and insists on his playing it, showing him how — how easy it is — and while gazing searchingly into his eyes, exclaims with ironical emphasis: “’Tis as easy as lying.” The words startle the courtier and bring the blush of shame to his face; for even now he feels himself unmasked as a master in the art of lying.

After Guildenstern had repeatedly and earnestly pleaded his inability to play even upon so simple an instrument as the flute, Hamlet proceeds in great irritation to interpret the parable with remarkable and unmistakable words of ridicule. “How unworthy you think of me! Zounds, (the holy wounds of Christ), do you take me for a simpleton? Do you fancy me simpler than this tiny reed upon which you cannot play? Its secret power is a mystery to you, and yet you attempt to strike my note, to find my compass, and to run the gamut of my thoughts and feelings, even to the deepest note in the hope of reaching the heart of my secret. ‘Sblood’, by the Eucharist, do you think I am easier than this tiny reed? You may fret me, but you cannot play upon me.” His passionate words, so terribly blunt and full of spirited resentment, overpower the courtier with confusion and reduce him abashed to painful silence.

The strained situation was opportunely relieved by the hurried entrance of the old chancellor. His unexpected appearance brought glad relief to the young spies; for it not only distracted Hamlet’s attention from them, but also afforded time for his mood of ill feeling to die away. They had come at the command of the Queen; but the fussy old minister was a self-appointed messenger, and, shuffling along in haste he hurries in, blurting out stale news. After suffering annoyance from the plaguing spies, the Prince was about to dismiss

them summarily in the hope of gaining, since the play, some moments for reflection upon his future course of action; hence, the inopportune intrusion of the babbling old chamberlain was more than usually unwelcome, and in utter weariness of soul, he greets him with the deprecation "God bless you, sir!" Such expressions as "God bless *us*," and "God bless *you*," are habitual utterances of good Catholics, when surprised by some sudden and unexpected evil. His exclamation, prompted by his harassed feelings, clearly indicates his depression of spirits and vexation at the unwelcome intrusion of the old minister.

Polonius seems never to have merited the respect of the Prince, even during the life of the elder Hamlet. His active alliance against him after the murder, his support of the succession of Claudius, as well as his constant over-officiousness and low intrigue, made him especially odious to the Prince. Heedless of the old man's urgent message, Hamlet begins to mystify him with sportive raillery. The chamberlain in turn, desirous of humoring the Prince in his supposed malady, adopts the practice, common in dealing with madmen, of assenting to all they say; but Hamlet aware of his disposition, takes the offensive, and, leading him on from one absurd contradiction to another, induces him to affirm that yonder cloud bears the shape of a camel, a weasel, and a whale. Amid the merriment, the young courtiers are glad to forget their castigation. During their laughter at Polonius, Hamlet gives us another flash of his sanity by the side remark: "They fool me to the full extent of my disposition." He then dismisses the trio curtly with the message that he will see his mother by and by.

I WILL SPEAK DAGGERS

In the high glee which followed the success of his stragem in regard to Claudius, Hamlet had yielded to an exalta-

tion of mind, which prompted him to give full play to his long suppressed feelings; but when the pressure of the unnatural strain caused him to call for music to soothe his overwrought excitement, his purpose was thwarted, as we have seen, by the intrusion of the spies and Polonius; hence, no time was given him for reflection upon the condition of affairs, nor upon the next move he should make in his purpose of revenge. Throughout these interviews, he had with a rare mastery of self veiled under an external composure, the excitement of his mind and heart. But now, alone and free from all restraint, he pauses for some moments on his way to meet his mother, and in soliloquy discloses the bloody nature of his thoughts. " 'Tis the witching time of night," when graves yawn forth their dead, and hell itself spreads contagion upon the world for the crimes done in the pall of darkness. Ruminating on the shameful disgrace of his mother and the heinous crime of his uncle, his burning thoughts so inflame his mind and sensibilities that in riotous fantasies and feelings, he could "drink hot blood," and do a deed so horrible that the world would quake to look upon it. The thought of his mother, whom he shall presently confront, and charge with shameful guilt, makes him realize the bloody purpose of his raging feelings. The soul of Nero seems, he thinks, to animate him, and he fears lest it shall lead him in the coming interview to a similar cruel and unnatural action. The accursed deed of the bloody tyrant forces on his mind a striking parallel: Nero was the murderer of his own mother, Agrippina, who after her husband's death, had married her uncle, the emperor Claudius. A Nero and a Claudius, foul names of cruelty and crime, so rouse his frame to an overpowering impulse of bloodthirstiness, that, actually afraid of losing mastery of himself, he with hands pressing upon his palpitating heart, invokes it in a passionate address, not to lose its nature. No, no! He must

not be a matricide! His feverish sense hears again the voice of his father's ghost:

“Taint not thy mind, nor let thy soul contrive
Against thy mother aught; leave her to heaven
And to those thorns that in her bosom lodge
To prick and sting her.”

Uncertain, whether his mother was privy to his father's murder, he is resolved to seek the truth or falsity of his suspicion. In dutiful obedience to his father's spirit, he will be cruel, but not unnatural. He will not use, but speak daggers to her soul. Though she be guilty, she is still his mother, and as a Christian son, he will speak burning words that shall fire her being, now torpid in incestuous crime, and inflame her heart with a virtuous sense of shame and horror, in order that, enkindling anew in her weak nature the Christian's love of good and abhorrence of evil, he may rouse in her sufficient strength of moral courage to break her sinful union with the horrid fratricide, and return to her former virtuous life.

SCENE THIRD

A ROYAL STRATAGEM

If Hamlet by means of the interlude gained his purpose of unmasking the guilt of the criminal, he thereby also revealed to Claudius the fact that he knew the secret of his crime; and this disclosure brought him further trouble. No sooner had the King "in his retirement," recovered from his "marvellous distemper," than he took immediate steps to guard himself against a man who, armed with such dangerous knowledge, roamed in the guise of lunacy with the freedom of the court. Suspicion and actual fear of the madman, now filled him with exaggerated alarm for his own personal safety. Always unscrupulous as to the means employed for the attainment of his purpose, he was, moreover by nature bold and decisive in action. At once his plan was formed. On the morrow, he will rid himself of this dangerous lunatic.

Unless we grant the court of Claudius to have been remarkable for mental dullness, we must suppose that all were of one mind with him in his fear of personal danger. Such an opinion requires no abstruse reasoning. Aware of the sudden and mysterious death of the elder Hamlet, and of his brother's hasty marriage with the widowed Queen, they witnessed the play of *The Murder of Gonzago* with its striking parallels, and the consequent strange confusion of the stricken Claudius, and observed Hamlet's tragic action and wild words of menace, all which were a gross insult to the King. Though joining in the general commotion and alarm which followed, they, as sycophantic courtiers, were wise enough to give their suspicious thoughts no words. Hence Rosencrantz and Guildenstern seemed not at all surprised to

hear the King express his fear of Hamlet, but even urged him to prudent caution. "I do not like him," says the King, "nor do I deem it safe for the good of others to let him further range in madness. Regard for the public weal demands that our sovereign power shall not be menaced hourly and subjected to imminent risks from the mad pranks of a lunatic prince. Wherefore I now commission you, my trusted agents, to go with him to-morrow on an embassy to England."

"We shall at once prepare," replies Guildenstern. In courtly terms he commends the fears of the King. They are most holy and religious. "As the sovereign of your subjects, you are bound in justice," he says, "to preserve them from danger; for their lives and well-being hang upon your majesty."

Rosencrantz always the more courtly, next proceeds in servile flattery to expand the thought of his companion: "If a private citizen is bound to defend his life when jeopardized, how much more so a king on whose existence depends the life and good of all. In him, an absolute monarch, are so concentrated all the functions of the State that he is one, as it were, with the State itself; hence, his death affects not himself alone, but also the whole realm. His life is, therefore, paramount; since on it depends the weal or woe of his people; for the King can never sigh but the nation groans, and if he fall, with him falls the State in "boisterous ruin." After this fulsome flattery, Claudius dismisses them with orders to prepare for a speedy voyage on the morrow. "He shall without delay put fetters upon his fears, as well as on the too free-footed madman."

The courtiers on leaving the presence of the King, suddenly come upon Polonius, who is hastening forward to disclose a new stroke of diplomacy. The old chancellor, never

doubting the power of his own statecraft, is ever anxious to swell his importance by making himself indispensable to his royal master. Finding Claudius recovered from the lately raging passion, he boastfully informs him of his design to resort again to his old system of espionage. Though his pet theory had been disproved to the satisfaction of Claudius, the wily minister was unwilling to admit his error; hence he still fondly hoped to prove by a new plot the truth of his assumption.

The occasion is the prearranged secret interview between Hamlet and the Queen, in which the latter by virtue of her maternal authority is to tax severely the conduct of her son, and to expose to him the unwisdom and folly of his ways. Polonius, hurrying before the King, exclaims: "Hamlet is going to his mother's closet. I deem it prudent to conceal myself behind the curtains in the Queen's private apartment so as to hear all that passes. I am sure she will chide him severely. My intrusion, if seemingly strange and unbecoming, is excusable and even warrantable by the well-known partiality of a mother for her son. It is, therefore, a wise policy for a third party to overhear the interview and report it aright."

With royal approval, the fatuous intruder hurries away in gleesome assurance of success. His parting words are a promise which he is not fated to fulfil. Of him Coleridge says: "Polonius' volunteer obtrusion of himself into this business while it is appropriate to his character, still itching after former importance, removes all likelihood that Hamlet should suspect his presence, and prevents us from making his death injure the prince in our opinion."

Certain annotators see in the action of Polonius sufficient warrant for the conclusion that the Queen was not privy to the murder of her husband. But the more common opinion is that Shakespeare throughout the drama leaves the reader

free to form his own judgment concerning the guilt or innocence of the Queen. The present passage, if attentively considered, will, we think, incline the reader's judgment neither one way nor the other. Both Claudius and his minister, it is true, distrust the Queen; but the cause of this mistrust, the Poet, in the person of Polonius, expressly asserts to be nothing more nor less than the instinct of nature that makes a mother partial to her child. Hence, as Gertrude's love for her only son had often been forced upon the attention of the King and Polonius, they might justly suspect that her true mother's love might impede her from revealing anything of the secret interview that was prejudicial to the interests of Hamlet.

This maternal partiality is, moreover, the only cause of distrust possible with Polonius for the reason that, wholly ignorant of the King's secret crime and of Hamlet's secret knowledge of the same, he can not be supposed to think of the Queen's innocence or complicity in a murder of which he himself is altogether ignorant. Far otherwise is the case with Claudius. He alone knew whether she was innocent, or guilty. If she were guilty, he had no other motive to mistrust her than the one assigned; if she were innocent, he might well fear that a loving son would communicate his discovery of the secret murder to a mother who was so closely concerned. Such suspicion on the part of Claudius, would, indeed, warrant his mistrust of the Queen; but the text gives no hint of its existence, and he himself, far too cunning to reveal it to Polonius, remains content to assign the one cause given: a mother's natural and instinctive affection for her son.

ATTEMPT AT REPENTANCE

At the departure of Polonius, the King finds an opportunity to reflect on his own state of mind and feelings.

Though keeping up a good appearance, he is all the while troubled by conscious guilt. Like Macbeth he proves the fact that a criminal, even with the coveted prize attained, can never enjoy real happiness. His sense of guilt had once before impelled him to confess:

“How smart a lash that speech doth
Give my conscience! O heavy burden!”

Fear of bodily harm, as a result of Hamlet's knowledge of the murder, prompts him to regret rather than to repent his crime. The soliloquy which graphically depicts his attempt at repentance, has been a source of difficulty. Many commentators have wished to harmonize it with their own diverging or even contradictory views concerning the justification of a sinner. Coleridge says: “the final *‘all may be well’* is remarkable; the degree of merit attributed by the self-flattering soul to its own struggle, though baffled, and to the indefinite half promise, half command, to persevere in religious duties.” If this opinion seem acceptable to a Protestant Christian, it cannot be admitted by the Catholic reader. To him it must appear an evident misinterpretation, not only of the words, “all may be well,” but also of the whole soliloquy.

An American author, commenting on the passage according to his views of justification, affirms:

“The words ‘all may be well’ with which he prologues his act of devotion, are very significant, as showing that his prayer is an attempt to make religion a substitute for duty. As often happens in real life, he betakes himself to a sentimental repentance, as absolving him from “doing works meet for repentance,” for who has not seen men resorting to very emphatic exercises of religion, as virtually dispensing from the law of good and pious works. It is observable that the king's fit of devotion operates to ease him through his course of crime, instead of deterring him from it. Such are the subtle tricks men practice on themselves to soothe the pangs of guilt without amendment of

life. The king goes from his closet to plot further crimes! Thus his prayer is "like a spendehrift sigh that hurts by easing"; that is to say he endeavors to satisfy or appease his conscience with a falsetto cry of penitence. Strange it should be so, but so it is!" (Hudson's *Hamlet*, p. 35.)

So indeed it is, if the soliloquy of Claudius be measured by the old Protestant notion of justification; but not, if, as we shall see, it be analyzed in the light of Catholic teaching.

Still more in contradiction to the text is another author, whose prejudice against the old faith leads him to quote with hearty approval the opinion of Professor Werner. The Professor, however, as a Positivist, was necessarily opposed to all Christian teaching in regard to sin and justification. He says: "This is the religion which helps to make Claudius a palterer with his conscience." Such a remark will appear to every one who is acquainted with the Catholic doctrine of repentance and justification, not only wholly unwarranted by the text, but also in contradiction to the same.

It seems strange, indeed, that non-Catholic critics, in commenting on this soliloquy, ignore for the most part the fundamental principle that underlies all sane criticism: that a character, to be read correctly, must be studied, not subjectively according to preconceived notions of the critic, but objectively as he is, with his motives, and purposes, and actuating moral and religious principles. It is clear that no critic's subjective view of Claudius can be correct, unless it be conformed to the objective truth or reality of the character as revealed in the drama. A subjective view may, indeed, give us a picture of Claudius, but it will be a spurious Claudius of the critic's own imagination, and not Shakespeare's own creation. Multitudinous proofs, scattered through his works, show that the Poet was intimately acquainted with Catholic beliefs, and, therefore, having once created Claudius as a believing, but non-practicing Catholic, he consistently

portrayed him actuated by the same beliefs in the attempted repentance; hence, a judgment to be correct, should conform to this portrayal.

The King, though theoretically a Catholic, lived practically a pagan, and, therefore, it is unreasonable to charge the religion which he mentally accepts, but *does not practice*, with the vices which that same religion condemns, and the more so, since that religion holds as a fundamental doctrine the revealed truth that "faith without works is dead." On the contrary, it is precisely because he fails to square his conduct with the moral and religious principles of the faith which he professes that he lives a criminal, the slave of vice, and an arrant hypocrite.

The soliloquy, moreover, in itself confutes the opinion that Claudius palters with his conscience. If to palter means to trifle, or to equivocate, or to be insincere, the King must surely be acquitted of the charge. He is terribly in earnest and sincere. If this is clearly pictured to the mind of every Catholic, it may be less clear and even unintelligible to other readers from the fact that their view of repentance and justification is radically different from the Catholic doctrine.¹ It seems reasonable, however, that the soliloquy should be read in the light of the religious principles of Claudius; for Shakespeare, while portraying the King, an astute hypocrite, whose life is at war with his creed, nevertheless, pictures him a theoretical adherent of the old faith. If thus read, we shall see briefly exposed in self-scrutiny of conscience the heart-searching of a guilty soul that exhibits more clearly in the concrete than would an abstract treatise, all the elements of the Catholic doctrine of repentance, as well as the successive stages of the conflict between a sinner's higher and lower nature, when attempting to burst asunder the captive bonds that hold him enslaved in sin. While the crime

¹ Vide Appendix.

of Claudius was securely locked in his own heart, he felt assured of safety and, wholly concerned in guarding the terrible secret, gave little thought to the heinousness of his offence; but the betrayal of his secret prompts the thought of danger to himself and his ambition, and causes him to view his crime through the eyes of others. In the enormity of his offence, which stamps the primal curse of Cain upon him, he feels that his blood-stained soul "smells to Heaven" for vengeance:

O, my offence is rank, it smells to heaven;
It hath the primal eldest curse upon't,
A brother's murder.

The thought of his crime against the Creator affects him less than the fear of evils which it may bring upon himself; in consequence, his inclination to genuine repentance is weak and springs from personal motives. If sorrow he has, it is prompted by a natural craving to assuage the torturing pangs of a remorseful conscience; hence, when his rational will commands him to pray to Heaven for aid, he finds it difficult and even repugnant, because, enslaved by sin and clinging to the fruits of his crime, he is devoid of that real supernatural sorrow, which is requisite for the remission of sin; and conscious, therefore, of his improper disposition, he feels a diffidence in the efficacy of prayer, and vacillates between despair and hope of pardon.

. "Pray can I not,
Though inclination be as sharp as will;
My stronger guilt defeats my strong intent;
And, like a man to double business bound,
I stand in pause where I shall first begin,
And both neglect."

If the all-absorbing sense of his enormous guilt, which drives him almost to the verge of despair, deadens the call of

conscience to prayer, he, nevertheless, labors to counteract it by mentally invoking the supernatural principles of religion that so often and so emphatically proclaim God's infinite mercy to repentant sinners: "If your sins be as scarlet, they shall be made as white as snow; and if they be red as crimson, they shall be white as wool."¹¹ Such like thoughts strengthen his confidence in God's mercy, and on His assurance he feels that were his "cursed hand" steeped still more deeply in his brother's blood, yet Heaven's rain of mercy would wash to whiteness its crimson stains. What is mercy, after all, he further queries, save to greet the penitent with proffered pardon. If mercy mean kindness and favor to the sinner; if mercy mean the foregoing of justice in the exercise of clemency even to the greatest culprit: why should not he, though deserving the direst punishment, look up to Heaven with courage, and confide in the promises of the God of mercies. Has He not said: "I desire not the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way, and live."¹²

. "What if this accursed hand
Were thicker than itself with brother's blood,
Is there not enough rain in the sweet Heavens
To wash it white as snow? Whereto serves mercy
But to confront the visage of offence?"

Confident of God's mercy, Claudius now thinks of invoking it by means of prayer. Is not, he affirms, the purpose of prayer to obtain Divine aid either to guard against falling into sin, or, having fallen, to be uplifted and pardoned? His religion teaches him that mercy is shown only to the penitent sinner whose compunction of heart is grounded on a supernatural motive, and that such repentance requiring the aid of God, is ordinarily obtained by prayer. Prayer, however,

¹¹ Isaiah, 1, 18.

¹² Ezech. 33, 11.

being in itself an act of Divine worship whereby we acknowledge the supremacy of the Creator, manifest our belief in His Divine Revelation, and confide in His promises, is a supernatural human act that absolutely needs Divine assistance.

Such prayer, when efficacious, obtains for the sinner a change of heart and prompts his will, once averted from good and adhering to evil, now really to wish to return to God; and this change of will is the preliminary step necessary in every conversion, in order to merit the approval of Divine Justice. "If thou wilt be converted, I will convert thee."¹³ Confidence in the power of prayer is not weakened in Claudius even by the consciousness of his unnatural crime; for he knows that the state of grace, or sinlessness is not a condition demanded for success in prayer: as the publican was heard, and again the penitent thief on the cross, so every sinner will be heard, if he pray as he ought. Furthermore, the thought that his "sin is past;" that the murder done can not be undone; and that he heartily detests it, urges him the more "to look up" to Heaven in suppliant prayer.

"And what's in prayer, but this twofold force,
To be forestalled ere we come to fall,
Or pardoned, being down? Then I'll look up;
My fault is past."

His resolve to appeal to the throne of mercy naturally gives birth to the thought of the form in which he shall clothe his prayer. Its form seems suggested by the petition of the Lord's Prayer, "forgive us our trespasses," but with the words on his lips, comes a disturbing truth that had hitherto escaped his thoughts. How can he pray for pardon as long as he retains the fruit of his crime? His religion teaches him that Divine Justice can not forgive a crime to which the sinner still adheres; that true contrition on which

¹³ Jer. 15, 19.

depends forgiveness, requires, not only sorrow for the crime, but also the renouncing of the unrighteous effects for which the murder was committed. Before he can really hope for pardon, he must, therefore, have a sincere and firm resolve to make restitution by the abandonment of his criminal ambition, by the yielding up the crown, and the sundering of his unholy alliance with the Queen.

This obligation, all-essential to the true spirit of repentance, appalls him for the moment, and his thoughts turn to the outer world, where wholly different is the sway of human justice. He knows well the corruptions of civil life, in whose courts covetous gold too often blinds justice, and stifles the voice of law; where culprits by sharing their ill-gotten prize, often escape the avenging hand of retribution. All this is so with human justice; but not so in the court above. There, sits enthroned an Omniscient Judge at Whose bar of justice "there is no shuffling," no indirect methods, no shifting ground, no artifice or trickery, no evasion nor prevarication, no tranquil alliance on the "blood of the Lamb," as all-sufficient without change of life and the undoing of the injustice done. His judgments incorruptible and unerring, are irrevocable and beyond appeal. In His presence, the culprit stands with his naked crimes, the accuser and the accused, with conscience his sole defence, and truth and justice his sole advocates.

. "But, O, what form of prayer
Can serve my turn? *Forgive me my foul murder?*
That cannot be; since I am still possessed
Of those effects for which I did the murder,
My crown, mine own ambition, and my queen.
May one be pardoned and retain the offence?
In the corrupted currents of this world
Offence's gilded hand may shove by justice;
And oft 'tis seen the wicked prize itself
Buys out the law; but 'tis not so above;

There is no shuffling,—there the action lies
In his true nature; and we ourselves compelled,
Even to the teeth and forehead of our faults,
To give in evidence.”

Conscious that his strong repugnance to right the wrongs which he has done, must make his efforts at repentance futile, the King, nevertheless, in remorse of conscience, which is roused to greater keenness by the thought of an Omniscient God and His unerring justice, feels an urgent impulse to make a trial before abandoning all hope. In the attempt, a contest arises between his higher and lower nature, in which the former demands the surrender of both crown and queen, and the latter rebels at the very thought. Distracted by this distressing conflict of his rational soul with the sinful passions of his animal nature, the unhappy man gives audible expression to his “wretched state,” confesses the sinful blackness of his heart, and feels that in struggling to escape the foul slough of sin, he only mires himself the more. In his utter helplessness, however, he thinks of Heaven’s aid; without it, he feels he can not throw off the bonds of sin. If he could only bow his “stubborn knees” in supplication, “all may be well;” the grace of God all powerful is promised to the prayerful man; and grace can transform the greatest sinner by softening his stony heart like wax, and endowing his weak will with the supernal strength of Christian fortitude. He will, therefore, “make assay.” Prayer is his only hope, and invoking the aid of the ministering spirits of Heaven, he kneels to God in suppliant prayer.

. “What then? what rests?
Try what repentance can? what can it not?
Yet what can it when one cannot repent?
O wretched state! O bosom black as death!
O limed soul, that struggling to be free
Art more engaged! Help angels! Make assay!

Bow, stubborn knees; and, herewith strings of steel,
 Be soft as sinews of the new-born babe!
 All may be well. (Retires and kneels.)

The progressive struggle between the King's worse and better self had reached its culmination. First, the gnawing worm of conscience having roused him to the sense of his heinous crime, remorse had urged him to repentance; the thought of repentance recalled the obligation of restitution as an absolute condition of pardon, and this obligation was confronted by a rebellious repugnance; with the hope of conquering it, his nobler self resolved to invoke by prayer Divine assistance as the only means of endowing his will with strength to subdue the sinful resistance of his baser nature. As soon, however as he actually engages in prayer, he discovers his sad plight.

(King rising from prayer)
 My words fly up, my thoughts remain below;
 Words without thoughts never to Heaven go.¹⁴

Long unaccustomed to prayer, he finds an insuperable difficulty in concentrating his mind on God. If his hollow words fly up to Heaven, his thoughts remain enchained to earth. Moreover, conscious that he is devoid of true contrition; that he is only half-repentant and only half-desirous of conversion, he feels ill disposed for pardon, and without the inspiration of firm hope, he lacks earnestness and fervor, and, in consequence, his listless, heartless words are meaningless and mechanical. The soul of the wretched man weakly fluttering in attempted flight, is held captive by the bonds of sin, the criminal passions of his earthly coarser nature. At heart he would repent, and yet retain the crown;

¹⁴ In the First Quarto this couplet reads:

"My words fly up, my sins remain below;
 No King on earth is safe if God's his foe".

at heart his love of ambition outweighs the love of God; at heart he would storm Heaven's gates of mercy, yet retain affections that bind him a slave to earth. Hence he feels that his prayer is a mockery in presence of an all-seeing God, Who searches human hearts, and Whose words, perhaps, re-echo in his ears: "this people honoreth me with their lips, but their hearts are far away."¹⁵ He rises from his half-hearted attempt at prayer, feeling some disappointment, but little disgust with himself. Perhaps like many a sinner, he calms his disturbed conscience with the vague notion of future conversion. Perhaps presuming on God's continued mercies, he flatters himself that under more favorable conditions, he will in after years, be better disposed to turn to Heaven in sincere contrition, and thus buoyed up by delusive hope, he exclaims, all may yet be well!

THE KING AT PRAYER

On the way to his mother, Hamlet unexpectedly comes upon Claudius engaged in prayer. There is marked progress in the role of the King, as well as in the play; for Hamlet has forced him by means of the interlude to make for the first time a verbal confession of his crime. "There is" says Werder "depth and power of invention here which has not the like. The course of the play, though appearing to drag, is chased by the storm of God, of Heaven, and of Hell, thundering together."

Hamlet's first feeling is astonishment at the wily hypocrite's attempt to ease his guilty soul; but astonishment quickly yields to other sentiments. In mind aflame with hatred of the crafty criminal, he is urged by an almost overpowering passionate impulse to strike the avenging blow. Never again may he have such an opportunity.

¹⁵ Matt. 15, 8.

With feelings of abhorrence and of murderous revenge, his glistening eyes are fixed upon the self-convicted fratricide kneeling before him, alone, unarmed, and even unconscious of his presence; and when in the fierce impulse of his animal nature aglow with a fiery thirst "to drink hot blood," the *man* is ready to rush upon him with gleaming sword flashing from its scabbard, he is suddenly checked, and the uplifted sword is stayed, not by fear, not by cowardice, not by irresolution of will, but because the *superman* ever active in an energetic mind grasps instantly the meaning of yielding in weakness to blind, irrational impulse. Reason cries aloud against it; and sane judgment dictates that the slaughter of Claudius at the present juncture, far from avenging the murder, would not only mar his design of a just and complete "revenge," but even make it forever impossible.

He is equal to the emergency, the *superman* at once assumes command, and with his usual characteristic strength of will bids the wild voices of tumultuous passions to be silent, and his rebellious lower nature to bide due time for complete "revenge." The fierce conflict of the *man* against the *superman* is not, however, so readily allayed. The former in the murderous impulse of raging passions continues a fierce assault against the prudent judgment of the latter, until in the fear of losing self-control, he invokes the powers of his higher nature, or of the *superman*, in order that, by his iron will and force of reason, he may conjure up motives that may effectually stem the blind onslaught of unreasoning passions of the man, or lower animal nature.

The first reason is prompted by the sense of commutative justice, which demands measure for measure. The idea of slaying the King in penitential prayer, and thereby sending his soul to heaven, instantly recalls by contrast the cruel mode of his father's death. He was sent without prepara-

tion, "gross" in sin and "full of bread"¹⁶ to his dread account. The thought recalls the wail of his father's spirit. The ghost had piteously complained that he was cut off in the blossoms of his sins, and sent to his account with all his imperfections on his head; that in refined cruelty, his brother had denied him the last sacraments of holy Church, which are always offered even to the most abject criminal.

Hamlet's expressed ignorance of how his father's "audit stands," is not, as some imagine, indicative of any doubt whether he be among the saved or lost. The ghost has positively settled this point, by assuring him that he is doomed for a certain time to purgatorial fires, till the foul crimes of earth are burnt and purged away. He is, therefore, assuredly among the saved. Yet, Hamlet has reason to doubt how his father's "audit stands;" for none save heaven can know how long a term Divine Justice has assigned for purgation.

Hamlet, however, as an educated Catholic, can, from "circumstances and course of thought," divine that the term of the ghost's suffering is far from short. He is well aware that each offense against the moral law, whether great or small entails, even after the guilt has been remitted, a temporal penalty to be undergone either in the present life or in the world to come. On earth these penalties can be cancelled by sacramental grace and good works, which are efficacious by the merits of the Savior. With this in mind, it is clear, why the ghost expresses grief that he was suddenly cut off "in the blossoms of his sins," and thus deprived of an opportunity to cancel his debt to Divine Justice; and again, why above all, he is aggrieved at having been robbed of the sacra-

¹⁶ The words, "full of bread" seem suggested by a passage in *Ezekiel*, 16, 46. — "Behold, this was the iniquity of Sodom, pride, fullness of bread, and abundance, and idleness". That is, these were the steps by which the Sodomites came to fall into those abominations for which they were destroyed. For pride, gluttony, and idleness are the high road to all kinds of lust.

ments, which as sacred rites of Divine institution are most effective in remitting to a great extent the temporal punishment due to sin. Hamlet, therefore, from his own knowledge of Catholic doctrine and from the revelation of his father's ghost, can justly infer that "'tis heavy with him," both as to the time of purgation and the severity of his sufferings.

This thought had all along engendered anguish of mind, and stirred his fond heart to sentiments of pity; but now it prompts him to compare the sad fate of the victim with the happy future of the murderer, should he slay him in "the purging of his soul." The striking contrast of their fates, vividly exposing the injustice of his contemplated act, causes a reaction, and in a terrible revulsion of feeling, he determines in exasperation to await a future opportunity, when he can strike in a genuine and just "revenge."

A MORE COMMENSURATE PUNISHMENT

If the reflection that to slay Claudius in prayerful contrition, and perhaps send his soul to heaven, would be an inadequate "revenge," and even an injustice to the memory of his suffering father, had caused Hamlet to sheathe his sword, it also prompted him to think of a punishment more commensurate with the crime. The very sight of the hated hypocrite at prayer, the thought of the horrid nature of his cold-blooded murder, and the memory of the terrible sufferings, which on the testimony of the ghost, he had brought upon his father in the spirit world; all fan the anger of the *man* into a fury akin to madness, and fill his mind with the wildest thoughts of unrestrained excess. His terrible words are the first natural impromptu imprecations of a filial son, who for the first time is certain that the usurper before him is the actual murderer of his father. This horrid, bitter certainty almost transforms the *man* for the moment into a

demon stirred by diabolical hatred. So violent has now become the fury of his surging passions, and so powerful the thirsting impulse to revenge, which assail the *superman* that, notwithstanding his prudent judgment, firm resolve, and strength of unyielding will in resistance, he fears he may lose control, and in consequence, in an anxiety to lull the frenzied insurrection of angry passions, he instinctively grasps the first motive suggested by the very hatred of the King himself. A criminal, like Claudius, he presumes will continue in his course of crime until overtaken by avenging justice; and this thought suggests to the *man* a gruesome possibility of "revenge;" he shall strike the crafty villain, not when "fit and seasoned for heaven," but "when he is drunk asleep, or in his rage, or at gaming, swearing, or about some act that has no relish of salvation in it. Then shall he trip him, that his heels may kick at heaven, and that his soul may be as damned and black as hell, whereto it goes."

His frightful words portray a fiendish suggestion which, though vividly pictured, is not deliberately embraced; for the *superman* still swayed by conscience, dominates the *man* and by his forceful energy of will maintains control. Hence, the thoughts expressed are not the real sentiments of Hamlet; they are in contradiction to his well-known principles, to his general deportment, and in fact to his whole character, and flow, not from the moral sense and rational nature of the *superman*, but are simply the expression of the wild rage of anger and of hatred, which agitate the irascible *man* of his lower and animal nature. In fine, mindful of his mother's summons, he departs with the thought that the King's prayer but prolongs his sickly, or remorseful days.

It is noteworthy that when uttering those terrible words, Hamlet had no anticipation of the catastrophe, nor premonition of the actual result. If in ignorance of the future, he

speaks with a prophetic spirit, it is solely because the Poet has designed to foreshadow in one of his hero's most angry moods, the nature of the punishment, which by decree of divine justice shall ultimately overtake the criminal. His purpose in fulfilling the words of Hamlet, is to show how he himself understands the "revenge," and how he wishes us to view it. His judgment, as well as his own idea of justice, he would impress upon us, and to this effect he fashions and builds up the Play.

THE REAL REASON

In the foregoing soliloquy, there is no indication of the real motive, which prompted Hamlet to sheathe the sword. His purpose was to quell the insurrection of his lower against his higher nature; and since for this, an appeal to the true cause of his inaction would have been, not only ineffectual, but even aggravating, he ignores it for the moment, and summons to his aid other motives, which by their very nature were apt to stay the onslaught of the man of his lower nature, riotous for revenge.

He should, say certain critics, have despatched the murderer at this one and only opportunity offered him. They affirm that the uplifted sword is not stayed for the reasons assigned, which after all are only artful excuses to gratify his wonted vacillation. As formerly, conscientious scruples concerning his uncle's guilt, served as subterfuges for habitual delay, so now, they say, after these doubts have been removed by absolute certainty, he again seeks delay, and imposes on himself by subtle theorizing on the duty of "revenge." We have already shown, however, that these scruples were not mere excuses, but actual and rational doubts of a conscientious Christian whose religious and moral principles forbade him to proceed in so grave a matter as

the slaying of his uncle, until he had laid aside all doubt of guilt.¹⁷

Again, they say, Hamlet does not strike the King, because he can act only under sudden impulse, as is well exhibited in the slaying of Polonius. Why, then, we ask, does he not despatch Claudius in the present instance? Never was he under a more sudden and stronger impulse to action. Shakespeare seems to have feared this misinterpretation, and, in consequence, has given us its refutation by picturing his hero in a supremely intense excitement at the very moment that he catches sight of Claudius. "Hell itself," he says, "breathes out contagion to this world; now could I drink hot blood, and do such bitter business as the day would quake to look on." How powerful, therefore, must have been the motive which induced a most remarkable self-control, and caused him in iron energy of will to suspend the fatal stroke? Hamlet, surely, lacks not force of will, but wilfulness. His will is strictly subject to reason and to conscience, as designed by the Author of our nature, and, therefore, yields when in conflict with them; but when free from rational restraint, his volition seems all will. "We are too apt to estimate men's force of will," says Hudson, "by what they do, and not by what they do not do; yet the latter often demands greater strength of will than the former." This fact is well illustrated in the peculiar situations of the hero, wherein his will enjoys its proper exercise in the recurring conflicts between his higher and lower nature. To restore harmony of will and reason is the greatest achievement of human power. The highest possible exercise of will is in renouncing wilfulness and abiding by the law instead, so that, paradoxical as it may seem, he may be said to have most force of will who shows no wilfulness at all. If Hamlet, therefore, fails to strike

¹⁷ Vide, part I, c. IX.

the King at prayer, it is from a self-restraint commanded by prudent judgment, and such restraint is but another name for the highest power of will.

This restraint was prompted by his sense of a twofold duty: the one to punish the fratricide and usurper, and the other, not to do so until he had at hand such tangible proofs for the citizens of Denmark as would convince them, not only of his uncle's crime, but also of the justice of the punishment. This was Hamlet's sense of duty. It was the mighty power which checked the uplifted avenging sword from falling upon the kneeling monarch. Had it fallen, it would in the stricken King, have murdered all possible proofs of his secret crime, and deferred his just and moral punishment till the day of universal doom. In the seemingly insuperable difficulties of the task lies the terror of the tragedy, its enigmatical horror, and its inexorable misery.

SCENE FOURTH

A SECRET INTERVIEW

The fourth scene, save a few introductory remarks of Polonius, is wholly concerned with Hamlet and his mother. Full of surprises, of striking situations, of high moral sentiment, and of beautiful poetic diction, it is admired as one of the Poet's masterpieces. The Queen has summoned her son in accordance with the command of Claudius, who, highly incensed at Hamlet's offensive conduct at the Play, insists that she rebuke him, and stay further outbursts of his wilfulness. As her well-known motherly love for Hamlet might cause her to give an incomplete and prejudiced account of the interview, Polonius with the King's connivance resorts to his usual diplomacy of espionage. His real purpose, though not expressed, appears to be the restoration of his injured reputation; for, still clinging to his fond theory of Hamlet's madness, he hopes in the secret interview to obtain proofs which will at length force Claudius to admit the correctness of his judgment. He lays special stress on the King's injunction that Gertrude berate her son severely. If Claudius had tolerated his pranks in the past, it was because she had screened him; but now, in high offense, he is ill-disposed to bear them longer. The Queen promises Polonius to chide her son severely, and, as she hears him calling from without — "Mother, Mother!" she instantly commands the old minister to withdraw.

That Hamlet's conduct in the present scene appears to certain minds, undutiful, harsh, and even bordering on savagery, is due, no doubt, to their forgetfulness of his cir-

cumstances and of the new relations which have sprung up between himself and his mother. If, however, we recall his filial love, which, intensified supremely by the lofty idealization of his mother's character, had been lacerated by her shameful conduct; if we consider his own nature, so highly sensitive to moral good and evil that, enamored of the one and abhorrent of the other, he feels a revulsion of soul at the disgraceful state of one so near and dear to him; if we reflect upon his own understanding of his duty of "revenge," a duty, which comprises not only the punishment of the usurper, by depriving him of life, crown, and Queen, but, moreover, the awakening of his mother's soul to a sense of her shameful guilt, in order to restore her to her former virtuous self: it seems evident that his conduct, far from being undutiful and harsh, is, on the contrary, clearly prompted by his strong filial love for an idol, which, though basely shattered, he is anxious to upgather, and, by induing it anew with his own esteem of virtue and of honor, to restore it to its lost dignity and splendor. Hence, his supreme filial love and sense of duty makes him the physician of her soul,—makes him apply the one sole remedy which, however painful, can alone revive her from a moribund state, and save her from a disgraceful moral death.

The scene is not only essential to the play, but, moreover, indispensable to Hamlet. As he had, by means of the interlude, disclosed to Claudius his twofold secret, the one of his feigned madness, the other of his knowledge of the murder, he perceives that his former method now worthless, must be superseded by some new device. But first of all, after his unmasking of the King, he must discover the extent of his mother's innocence or guilt, and expose to her his own position towards herself and the criminal.

A RASH INTRUDER

Polonius had scarcely time to conceal himself, before Hamlet enters upon the scene in an intense excitement, which is reflected in his burning looks and passionate words and action. Gertrude had nerved herself to rebuke her wayward son in terms most vigorous, but in surprise she is on the instant placed upon the defensive; for her son boldly and terribly direct, proceeds at once to the moral onslaught. His mother, he charges, has grievously sinned against his father, and now speaks with "a wicked tongue." In painful surprise at his accusing words, and in fear of his threatening anger, she, supposing him demented, imagines that he does not recognize her. Quick is his scathing reply, in which he swears by the holy rood, or crucifix that he knows her too well, the wife of his father's brother, and, in tones full of loathing and disgust, he affirms, "would it were not so!" But his next words, "*you are my mother,*" are uttered in slow emphasis full of burning scorn, and all alive with feelings of regret, disdain, and overpowering shame. They fall like dagger's strokes, and, under their rankling wounds, she is roused to anger, and rises to depart. Stayed in her attempt, however, and forced back, she cowers beneath his wrathful mien, and hears in fear his fierce command, not to budge till he shall have unveiled to her gaze as in a mirror, the blackness of her heart and the hideousness of her sin-stricken soul.

To appreciate Hamlet's position, it is necessary to recall the fact that the scene occurs within the hour after the interlude at which Claudius had betrayed his guilt; that, already on his way for the interview with his mother, he had paused, and excited in a brief monologue his fierce feelings of revenge; that the thought of her connivance at the crime had so roused his irascible nature to sentiments of rage and fury

as actually to inflame him with the cruel, murderous, spirit of a Nero; and that this spirit became still more violent and riotous for blood, when by chance he beheld the criminal at prayer.

While in this state of mind he meets his mother a few moments later. Though restraining with difficulty his feelings of resentment, and firmly resolving to be cruel, but not unnatural, to speak daggers, but to use none, his anger is further heightened, when his mother, in irritation at his words, would break off the private interview, and so frustrate his purpose of sifting her guilty soul. His fire-flashing eye, his livid face, and commanding words alive with rage, cause her to quail before his fury. Seized with terror and fearing bodily harm and even murder, she cries aloud for aid.

Unfortunately, Polonius takes up the cry, and surprises Hamlet by the amazing fact that he is spied upon again. How can he imagine that the old chancellor lies concealed at that time of night behind the tapestry of the Queen's private apartment? That moving form can be none other than the King's. There within his reach, again detected in an act of treachery, is the horrid criminal and usurper, the foul murderer of his father, and the seducer of his mother. His hated presence together with these thoughts, suddenly conjure up all his sense of wrongs and shame, rack his frame to its inmost depths, and so fire his wrath to uncontrolled rage and consuming fury, that swept away beyond himself, forgetful of his better judgment, unmindful of his conscientious duty of a moral revenge, he instantaneously as a flash draws the deadly weapon, and gives the fatal stroke.

Hamlet turns to his victim behind the arras, and lifting the tapestry, discovers in surprise and amazement the corpse of Polonius. All intent upon the urgent business with his mother, he is too engrossed at the present moment to pro-

nounce but a brief epitaph upon the "wretched, rash, intruding fool," whose shallow diplomacy says Horn, brought him to a sorry end:

"The death of Polonius forms a tragic epigram, the deepest, perhaps, which a poet ever conceived. One would willingly wish the half-honest, half-wise, witty fool of a man to live in his happy and ornamental fashion, but he is suddenly hurried off, so entirely without preparation, as it were in the intoxication of his clumsy intrigue, caught in the pitiful attitude of an eavesdropper, which he had just volunteered to take, in order to win a word of praise from a king rich only in phrases."

THUNDERS IN THE INDEX

After that deadly stroke, Hamlet turns his scornful glance upon the silent partner in this latest spying treachery. Now sure that he is free from listeners, he seizes instantly the opportunity to force his mother to confess by word or action, whether she in any way conspired to the murder of his father. Trembling in rage, with naked, bloody sword in hand, he stands before her, peering into her eyes, and ready to scan every passing look and move as he utters in changed tones the appalling charge: "Kill a king, and marry with his brother." Had she quaked or quailed at those terrible words so unexpectedly hurled against her, and so awful in their revelation; had she winced, and shrunk back unnerved and cowering beneath his questioning and torturing gaze; had she at that crushing charge, by telltale eye, affrighted countenance, and disconcerted action, in any manner betrayed her guilt like Claudius, we dread to surmise the horrible result. Unflinching, she stood that infallible test: only surprise and innocence seemed written on her face.

Critics are much divided between Gertrude's guilt and innocence. Hamlet, assured by the ghost of her infidelity to his father, seems, moreover, to doubt all along whether she was

an accomplice in the blacker crime. On this point the First and Second Quartos differ widely. In the former, which follows closely the legend of Amleth, she emphatically affirms her innocence in the words:

“But as I have a soul, I swear by heaven,
I never knew of this most horrid murder,”

and after the present scene she not only becomes an active partisan of Hamlet, but also promises her aid in his purpose of revenge:

“Hamlet, I vow by that same Majesty
That knows our thoughts, and looks into our hearts,
I will conceal, consent, and do my best,
What stratagem soe’er thou shalt devise.”

In the Second Quarto, however, as well as in our modern text, the extent of the Queen’s guilt is left vague and doubtful: she vacillates to the end between Claudius and her son. It may be noted that the ghost, while charging the murder to the King, does not affirm the Queen’s innocence, but commands that she be left to the judgment of heaven; that nowhere does the murderer indicate his sister-in-law’s collusion, nor even insinuate her knowledge of the crime; that, unlike Claudius, she betrays neither at the interlude, nor in the present scene any consciousness of guilt. Had she connived at the murder, then, because of her most surprising self-command, she must be rated one of the strongest characters of the play; whereas, all other incidents prove her the weakest.

Though the Queen is greatly distressed at the sight of the corpse and at her son’s continued excitement, Hamlet proceeds with burning eloquence in his purpose of awakening her by words of reproof and indignation to a sense of her shameful conduct and to the infamy of her present state. If habitual sinning has not deadened her moral sense of evil, and choked the voice of conscience, he yet hopes to excite in her the better

feelings of the woman, and to re-ignite in her heart a true mother's love. Her query, in remonstrance, is in keeping with her character; without clear and distinct notions of moral responsibilities, she seems not to divine the true cause of her son's anger and indignation. Before her mind is Hamlet's implied charge of murder against Claudius; but she attempts no refutation. Her ignorance of her son's secret information, leads her, perhaps, to imagine that indifference to her former husband's death, as indicated by her over-hasty marriage, as well as by her neglect to press for an explanation of his sudden taking off, which by reason of its gruesome and mysterious manner excited grave suspicion, is the cause of Hamlet's present angry reprehension. If so, severe is the shock of her awakening, as in poignant, scathing terms, he commands her to leave off wringing her hands. If her heart be made of penetrable stuff, if it be not brazened by damned custom against conscience and the sense of shame, he shall make her look therein, and see how horrid and black it shows.

In self-defense the irritated mother questions what she has done that he dare reproach her in terms so noisy and so rude. The question shows her impervious to a sense of guilt and shame, and only irritates her son the more. He proceeds to charge her with conduct that blights the beauty and the modest blush of chastity, confounds vice and virtue, wilts the rose on the brow of pure love, and sets a blister there.¹⁸

Gertrude as already shown was only a nominal or non-practicing Catholic. Though outwardly professing the Christian religion of the elder Hamlet and her son, she cared little for its principles and moral precepts. Still unweaned from the old religion of Odin, which was yet common to many of her subjects, she followed in private life the more indulgent customs of the pagan Norsemen. Hence her conduct was specially

¹⁸ An allusion to an old time custom of branding harlots on the forehead.

offensive to her son. In what this offence particularly lay, non-Catholic critics usually fail to grasp, because they disregard the difference between modern lax notions of matrimony, which have flowed from the doctrines of the "Reformers," and those of the Church, which now as in Hamlet's day holds marriage to be a sacred and sacramental contract.

His grief, shame, and indignation arose not only from his mother's previous perfidy to his father, but more from her sinful and incestuous union in a pretended marriage with his uncle.¹⁹ He felt assured that her pagan laxity of morals, while disgracing him, would also be a *scandal* to the public eye, and would, moreover, sanction license in life at court. As a Catholic he knew that matrimony is not a mere natural contract, but over and above a sacred rite, a holy sacrament of grace instituted by the Savior Himself; and, therefore, he charges his mother with having perjured her vows of "sweet religion," and made them an empty parody of words. Her lawless and incestuous union has desecrated a holy sacrament, has sacrilegiously plucked from the sacred contract its life-giving principle, its very soul, and left it a lifeless body, subject to the natural law of decay. His abhorrence of her crime induces a high strain of passion, and his fervid mind rises in denunciation to a noble and poetic climax: All nature is affected by her sin; heaven glows with the blush of indignation; earth loathes it, and seems stricken with grief and horror, as if doomsday were at hand. The noble lines vividly suggest Milton's description of the immediate consequences of the first sin:

"Earth trembled from her entrails, as again
In pangs, and Nature gave a second groan,
Sky lowr'd, and mutt'ring thunder, some sad drops
Wept at completing of the mortal sin
Original." (Book IX.)

¹⁹ Vide, part I, Chap. VII, p. 49.

Though anxious and in fear from her son's towering passion and angry words, Gertrude, who is characteristically obtuse in matters of morals and religion, still holds out against her son's accusation, and, hiding behind his supposed ignorance of her guilt, asks in assumed innocence the cause of his angry denunciation:

“Ay me, what act,
That roars so loud and thunders in the index!”

A CONTRAST

Stirred by her obstinacy and pretended ignorance, Hamlet grows more indignant, and proceeds to particulars. His action accompanying the words, “Look here, upon this picture, and on this,” has been diversely described. Some annotators suppose that the pictures are seen by the mind's eye only; others, that Hamlet wears a miniature of his father, and the Queen one of the present King. The common practice of the stage, however, since the Restoration, affirms Davies, has been for Hamlet to draw two miniatures or medallions from his pocket. But such action seems objectionable; since it is most improbable that the Prince carried about with him a picture of the hated criminal. Again, it is thought that from the time of the original performance, two royal portraits at half length were hung in the Queen's closet, as is shown in the illustrated frontispiece of Rowe's edition of Hamlet of 1709. Another opinion, the most common and the most probable, is that Hamlet draws a miniature of his father from his pocket, and then turns to point to a picture of Claudius exposed upon the wall.

Inspired by filial affection, Hamlet proceeds in glowing hyperbole to picture his father as a paragon, on whom Jupiter, supreme in intellect; Apollo, in beauty; Mars, in valor; and Mercury, in swiftness and despatch, had each “set his

seal," in order "to give the world assurance of a man." From this hyperion, he turns to the picture of the satyr, who "like a mildewed ear has blasted his wholesome brother."²⁰

The contrast heightens his indignation, and in sentiments of inexpressible disgust, he queries how she could have left this "fair mountain" of perfection, "to batten" on a quaggy moorland. Hers is not the impulsive, blinding love of youth; for at her stage of life, love waits upon the judgment. Her reason must be wholly "apoplexed;" even the senseless and insane retain, unlike to her, some power of choice. Inspired by the Christian doctrine that fallen angels, or evil spirits in their hatred of God, tempt mortals to rebellion against the Creator and his moral laws, he demands "what devil" has hoodwinked and defrauded her of all feeling, save one sickly passion, and left her witlessly "to mope" in delusion. Where is her blush of shame? If "rebellious hell" can thus mutiny in a matron's heart, and make reason subservient to lustful passion, then youth can find no safety, unless it be aflame with the sense of moral beauty, and glow with an enthusiastic and passionate love of virtue.

The foregoing portraits of the elder Hamlet and of Claudius, contain, it is reasonable to suppose, some elements of exaggeration. The Prince's high eulogium of his father, as well as his low debasement of his uncle, are both tinted by opposing passions: the one by extreme love, and the other by extreme hate. To be powerfully and oppositely swayed by love and hatred is a characteristic of human nature; when love dominates the heart, its kindly eye sees the virtues of the object beloved loom bright in the sheen of white light, which obscures vice by its shadows; when hatred, on the contrary, rages in the heart, its hostile eye, blind to the good, sees only what is

²⁰ An evident allusion to Pharaoh's dream: "Seven ears of corn came up upon one stalk full and fair; then seven other ears sprung up thin and blasted, and devoured all the beauty of the former". Gen. 41, 6.

hateful, and in magnified proportions. Hamlet's sire was no doubt a grand and lofty character, worthy of high respect and filial love; otherwise the supreme affection and veneration for the father remain unintelligible in the son, who himself among men was in moral and intellectual nature a giant among pigmies, and who, in his esteem and love of the good and the true, is everywhere no less resplendent than in his hatred of evil, of falsehood, and of moral ugliness. On the other hand, it is not improbable that the portrait of Claudius is a little overdrawn by an artist whose touch is quickened by a burning sense of wrong and hatred. Undoubtedly, the King was a degenerate, base, and ignoble character, devoid of moral principles, whose life shows him a stranger to virtue, and a friend to vice; nevertheless, if we would avoid a mystery, we must admit his possession of more than common intellectual endowments and of certain commanding and attractive qualities, which enabled him to gain ascendancy over the nobles, and to sway them in favor of his accession to the throne, as well as to win the affection of the Queen, and to retain it even after she was aware of his crime. Many men, like Claudius, developed in intellect, but stunted in moral growth, have, nevertheless, by reason of certain qualities won the favor of the multitude, which is characteristically blind or indifferent to the interior or spiritual side of its heroes: "vice is by action often dignified."

A KING OF SHREDS AND PATCHES

Inspired by a love of rectitude and burning with moral indignation, Hamlet continues his efforts to rouse and quicken his mother's callous conscience. With brain and heart on fire and his thoughts flowing like lava, fiercer, hotter, faster, Hamlet's words sharp as daggers pierce her stolid heart, and open wide her eyes to the black and ingrained spots upon her soul.

Beneath the blasts of his terrible and crushing invective, her callousness at length melts away, and, humbled and suffused with the sense of shame and guilt, she feels she can bear no more. Closing her ears, she cries for mercy against his fierce burning words: "O, Hamlet speak no more! Thou dost expose my naked soul, wherein I see such horrid stains that will not be cleared away."

"Aye, Aye!" answers Hamlet to her words of piteous appeal. "But wilt thou stewed in corruption continue in incestuous union with that murderer and villain?"

In reply, his mother can but cry: "O, Hamlet, speak no more! No more! Thy every word pierces my ears, like very daggers. No more, sweet Hamlet, speak no more!"

The son, however, in supreme excitement is unable to stay the full tide of his passionate resentment, and turns from the humbled, shamed, and pleading mother to empty the vials of his wrath upon her paramour, the murderer and villain. Him, for the first time, he openly charges with murder. A very slave, he is not a fraction's worth of her former husband. He is but a vice of kings, a buffoon, a cutpurse, who, during the interregnum, stole away the crown, and wears it, a very King of shreds and patches.

Vice was a comic stock-character common to the Morality Plays, which still survived in the days of Shakespeare. The term arose from the fact that *Vice* personified the vicious qualities and evil passions of human nature, and was usually attired in a motley garb of varied colored patches. A senseless character, full of contradictions and often nothing more than a buffoon, he was the forerunner of our modern clown or jester, and during the interludes of the drama, was frequently allowed to entertain and amuse the groundlings. The Poet refers to *Vice* in several Plays, for example, in *The Twelfth Night*, the clown makes allusion to his forefather, *Vice*:

“I am gone, sir,
And anon, sir,
I'll be with you again
In a trice,
Like to the old *Vice*.
Your need to sustain;
Who with dagger of lath,
In his rage and his wrath,
Cries Ah, ha! to the devil.”

(IV. 2.)

A GHOSTLY VISITOR

While Hamlet in the height of passion is inveighing against the murderer and usurper, he catches sight of his father's ghost entering the chamber. In surprise he is suddenly seized with awe and fear, and, forgetting all else, calls on the angelic aid of heaven. It is another instance of his deep faith in the supernatural. After recognizing the spectre to be his father's ghost, he feels uneasy in the guilty fear that it comes to chide him for delay in the execution of the “dread command,” and, therefore, in eagerness he directly questions it in plaintive tones: “What would your gracious figure?”

To the critics who maintain that the spectre is not objective, or real, but only the reflected production of Hamlet's overwrought imagination, the words of the ghost, “This visitation is but to whet thy almost blunted purpose,” offer no difficulty; they are nothing more than the echo of the Prince's own thoughts. Among others, however, defending the reality of the ghost, and its actual reappearance in the present scene, is Professor Werder, who says:

“The ghost's visit is only to whet Hamlet's almost blunted purpose; but he does not blame the son, nor read him a lecture, because he has done nothing, as the critics would have it, nor does he make a crime of his delay, as they do. Only Hamlet himself does that. The ghost understands the state of things, and leaving the manner and time of the revenge to his son, nowhere intimates that a mere thrust of the dagger in hot-blooded thirstiness will suffice.”

Hamlet in turn, knows that a purgatorial ghost could inspire nothing evil, nothing more than a licit revenge or punishment; and he also knows that, for its attainment, he has done all that was possible. It was absolutely necessary, as already shown, that before he strike, he should discover the good or bad nature of the ghost, as well as the real guilt of Claudius. That very night he has for the first time discovered both, and now when in furtherance of his moral revenge, he is laboring to wean the Queen from her criminal infatuation for the usurper, and when he has already awakened her dormant conscience, and brought her to confess in shame her sinful state, his father's ghost appears, not clad as before in the full panoply of war, but in a more familiar garb: he comes a suppliant for the soul of the Queen.

The visit was most opportune; for though the ghost had imposed on Hamlet the command "to contrive naught against his mother," he recognized a probable danger when he saw the mother in dread and terror shrinking away from the son whose riotous passion surging into rage and fury might impel him to a rash or unconscious act of madness. What the mother could not do, the ghost of the father does. By his sudden appearance he allays at once the violent passion of Hamlet, and induces other thoughts and feelings. While briefly reminding his son of the purposed revenge, his words in the main concern the Queen. He seems to perceive the interior of her mind and heart, her fluctuation between good and evil in a contest for and against an amendment of life. Admitting her guilt and shame, Gertrude found it difficult to break with the past. She saw the right; but seeing is not doing. In the conflict she felt the force of evil habits strong against the voice of conscience. Comprehending her hesitation, the ghost implores Hamlet "to speak to her, to step between her and her fighting

soul," in order to support her weak will wavering between a continuance in evil and a return to a virtuous life .

The Queen in amazement had gazed on her son as, with eyes fixed on vacancy, he spoke to what seemed from his words to be his father's ghost. After a graphic description of his surprising action, she herself in surprise and fear questions, "Why he bends his gaze on airy nothing, and converses in awe and fear with the incorporeal and invisible?"

In reply, Hamlet points in excitement to the ghost, notes his pallid face and blazing eyes, and affirms that his spectral form and cause combined have sufficient power to make the very stones cry aloud for justice. There is an evident allusion to our Savior's words, when to the envious pharisees He replied: "I say to you, that if these shall hold their peace, the stones will cry out."²¹ Hamlet again addressing the ghost, pleads that he look not on him with such piteous gaze, lest, by exciting sentiments of tenderness and compassion, he dissolve like dew his sworn purpose of revenge, and bring tears perchance for blood.

Is the ghost in the present scene to be considered as indubitably real and objective as in his first visit on the battlements of Elsinore? The evidence for its reality, while not as convincing as in the former case, seems, nevertheless, sufficient to warrant the opinion that it was the same real, purgatorial ghost, and not a chimera, or fanciful creation of Hamlet's overheated mind. Certain critics may deem it a mere illusion, but we are less concerned with their positivistic opinion than with the intent of Shakespeare. That he intended it as real is shown from his stage direction, which requires the ghost to enter visibly upon the scene, and to speak the words assigned it. He, moreover, in the First Quarto and in other editions, specifies its attire, which differs from that worn on its first

²¹ Luke, 19, 40.

visit. If the spectre were the product of Hamlet's imagination, he would naturally have imagined it as it appeared before, clad in full armor. That he alone sees it, is no proof of its unreality; since the Poet is known to have accepted the immemorial and universal tradition that a ghost can at will make itself visible to those only with whom it has to deal. The mission of the ghost, moreover, as already shown, was secret and to Hamlet alone.

Yet, says Hudson, "The words put into the ghost's mouth, are to be regarded as merely the echo of Hamlet's own thoughts. The ancients could not take the idea of subjective visions as we use them." A strange remark, indeed, since neither a study of psychology, nor great keenness of mind is required to distinguish between subjective and objective visions. The ancients, as it is well known, were as well aware as moderns that persons suffering from high nervous excitement, or hysteria might be subject to visions; and in consequence, they did not accept any vision as real without convincing proof of its reality. Scepticism, moreover, has been a luxuriant weed in the garden of the world from time immemorial. Furthermore, that critics of sundry non-Christian schools should affirm the subjectivity of the ghost, is, of course, a consequence of their principles; denying a priori the supernatural, as well as the immortality of the soul, they must in consistency reject the preternatural, or all that is not natural. But upon such schools and principles Shakespeare frowned. The many Christian truths, which illuminate his dramas, clearly show that he was a firm believer in the supernatural and in the spirit world. He never fails to employ the preternatural, when serviceable, as a powerful element in the development of his plots. Writing, not for the reading public, but expressly for the stage, it was but natural that in the enactment of his plays, he should make his ghosts objective, in

order to win more readily the interest of his audiences, which like himself were firm believers in the supernatural.

CONFESS YOURSELF TO HEAVEN

As Gertrude neither sees nor hears the ghost, she readily thinks it the fantastic effect of her son's "ecstasy" or madness. She insists that it is nothing more than the coinage of his brain, which when the mind is unbalanced is very cunning in the creation of such immaterial and invisible objects.

"Ecstasy," exclaims Hamlet in indignant surprise. Though hitherto he had fostered in his mother the notion of his dementia, he could not now allow her to continue in the error; it would frustrate his present purpose of leading her back to a virtuous life. Accordingly, he earnestly insists upon his sanity, and implores her not to imagine that both his reproaches for her evil conduct and his exhortation to a better life, are the utterances of a demented mind. His pulse beats as healthful as her own and with the same natural regularity. Let her challenge him to an acknowledged test, and he will repeat with exactitude every word spoken before and after the appearance of the ghost, a feat which she well knows no madman can perform.

In tones softened down from high excitement to a deep feeling of filial affection, he lovingly pleads in the name of God's grace that she soothe not her troubled conscience with the unctious thought that his madness, and not her sinfulness has inspired his words. Such delusion will bring but false health to her ulcerous soul, and leave it to grow all unseen in rank corruption. He urges her to confess her sins, to grieve for the past, to resolve avoidance of further trespass, and not by continued concubinage to spread further the compost of evil on her soul, lest her increasing guilt may rise in the face of heaven with corruption more offensive. In tones

of deep sorrow glowing with affection, he craves her pardon for his virtuous denunciation of her past and warmth of pleading in behalf of her better and nobler self; the times have grown so gross from luxurious living that "virtue itself of vice must pardon beg," woo the favor of the wicked, and deem it a privilege to do them good.

If we consider the plaintive and whole-soul intensity of the son's utterances, the solemn and religious adjurations, the grave and well-grounded remonstrances heightened in growing climax; if we duly estimate the fiery glow of a moral nature whose virtuous repugnance for evil inspires him by burning appeals to awaken to a sense of sin and shame the slumbering conscience of his erring mother, we have strong reasons to conclude that by the powerful portrayal of his hero in this, one of his grandest scenes, the Poet again wishes to impress upon us the fact that his hero is not a man demented and morally irresponsible, but of sound mind, and even of sane minds the sanest.

MASTER THE DEVIL

The mother had been roused to fear and terror by her son's invectives, but now she feels her better self stirred to consciousness by his words of kindly feeling, which clearly manifested his sympathy and love, and she exclaimed:

"O, Hamlet, thou hast cleft my heart in twain."

With a pleading tone of affection he enjoins that she cast away the worsen part and live the purer with the better half. In presence of her repentant disposition, he earnestly supplicates her to enter upon an immediate amendment of life. Her incestuous marriage is null and void, and to continue therein is to live in perpetual sin. The only remedy is absolute separation; but to enjoin it in her circumstances, is to enjoin

the dethronement of Claudius, and this under present conditions, he sees is impossible, save by the avenging blow, which he soon expects to strike. In the meantime, he insists upon her avoidance of the proximate occasion of sin. She must at once assume the virtue of chastity, though she have it not; assume it, not in pretense, but in an efficacious desire, which ordinarily facilitates its inward acquirement. To show how easy amendment is he dwells like a philosopher on the power of good and evil customs and habits, and, in a pithy exposition of their nature, formation, and eradication, gives an excellent summary of what Catholic moral philosophers treat more discursively.

Habits naturally result from the frequent repetition of the same act, and this repetition inclines to facility of action. If the inclination be to an action morally good, it is called virtue; but if to one morally evil, it is known as vice. The latter, says Hamlet, is a monster that like a devil destroys all consciousness of wrong-doing; while the former is an angel to the virtuous, for it gives facility and ease to the exercise of virtue. Hence he urges his mother to restrain her evil passion. By each abstention from vice, she will not only weaken her evil habit, but also accustom and strengthen herself in the opposite virtue; and as custom "can almost destroy the stamp of nature," it will soon arm her with the "wondrous potency" of mastering the devil or of throwing him out altogether.

The unhappy mother's wail of sorrow had inspired him with sentiments of pity and compassion, such as pure hearts feel for the weak and fallen; and a son's devotion, which was heightened by Christian faith, prompted his supreme efforts to transform her cry of misery into a firm and religious resolve. Now bidding his mother good night, he assures her in filial fondness that as soon as, contrite of heart and resolved

to amend, she humbly prostrates herself before God to implore forgiveness, he too on bended knee will ask her blessing.

In this interview, in which Hamlet "moulds his mother like wax to his better will by the miraculous energy of his expressions, his whole attitude is that of an inspired prophet. Laboring giant-like to save her struggling soul, he reaches down a redeeming hand through the darkness of the deep abyss, and drags her, half willing, half reluctant, bruised, trembling, bleeding, into the full daylight of God's holy summits,"¹ where the erring and repentant find grace, strength and consolation.

A CAUTION

After bidding his mother good night, Hamlet turns and pauses some moments before the corpse of Polonius. Pre-occupied in the moral conflict with his mother at the time of the minister's death, he had scarcely realized its meaning; but with calmness of mind restored, he recognizes the gravity of his rash and luckless act.

Did Polonius merit his fate like others who intruded themselves upon him, and entangled themselves in the work of his "revenge"? The minister was far from innocent. After Claudius he was, in the eyes of Hamlet, the worst offender, and of the royal coterie of sycophants the most detested. Promoting, like a time-serving politician, the incestuous marriage in violation of the moral law recognized by Church and State; abetting the base ambition of the wicked Claudius, even to violating Hamlet's right to the crown; intruding himself in dishonorable espionage upon him on all occasions; advocating repeatedly and urgently his confinement in a prison; traducing his character to Ophelia, and thereby ruining her innocent and happy life, and hastening her untimely death; all this and more is charged against the old

¹ Geo. Miles, "Essay on Hamlet".

minister, who ambitioning the premiership, became with little shame and less honor the willing prime mover in the evil cause of the greatest criminal in all Denmark.

When Polonius fell overtaken in dishonor, Hamlet, nevertheless, repented the undesigned blow. To him, an unconscious agent, it was rather an unfortunate than a guilty act. Its responsibility must rest with Heaven; it had willed it so. Having made him "the scourge and minister" of its purgatorial agent from the spirit world, it had designed him as the unwitting instrument of this man's death. Hence, morally guiltless, he can with clear conscience say before God and man, "I will answer well the death I gave him."

Again turning to bid his mother good-bye, he observes her dejected mien, and with sentiments of filial devotion assures her that if she thought his conduct cruel, his purpose was only to be kind. A glance at the corpse gives birth to the thought that happy chance had saved him from frustrating beyond hope his purpose of "revenge." The accidental death of Polonius was a bad beginning "and worse remains behind."

His assumed madness now revealed, Hamlet felt the necessity of enjoining secrecy. Hence before departing he exclaims, "one word more, good lady." Gertrude, though penitent and tractable, feels bewildered concerning her future conduct, and in mental anxiety asks, "What shall I do?" In words of enforced irony he replies: "By no means do what I bid you." Let the bloated King by amorous arts induce you to betray the secret you have learned, that my madness is naught but craftiness. These words are another flash-light to illumine those who may be in darkness concerning the hero's real sanity. Insane persons may affirm their sanity; but no one demented has been known to claim that his madness is but craftiness.

"How," asks Hamlet in further irony, "can she, a Queen,

fair, sober, and wise, hide from a paddock, a bat, a gib, a secret that so much concerns him?" A paddock, bat, and gib were all familiars of witches and were acquainted with their secrets.

"Shall she," continues Hamlet, "in spite of good sense and honor, imitate the famous ape, and at her own peril unpeg the basket on the house's top, and let the birds fly?" His reference is to some story or fable which, though well known at the time, has since been lost. The mother in reply earnestly assures him of her fidelity which she solemnly pledges on her life. The son in turn discloses his knowledge of the King's new design.

THEY MARSHAL ME TO KNAVERY

It may be asked, how did Hamlet come to know so soon that Claudius had decided to hurry him off to England on the morrow? The intended embassy was known only to Polonius and the young spies. Some suppose that on the way to his mother he had overheard the conversation of Claudius and his secret agents; others think, what seems a more probable solution, that he got the news from his trusty friend, Horatio, for whom he had obtained some position at Court, where he could discover state secrets. To Hamlet's penetrating mind, which delights in intellectual subtleties, the scheme of Claudius is as clear as day. The pretended embassy is a snare, and the two spies with sealed letter he will trust no more than poisonous reptiles. Conscious of his practical strength to render futile any plot against his person, he feels prepared for everything, and in confidence defies the King and his secret agents. They bear the mandate and marshal him to knavery. If it go hard with them, let them look to it. Already, he has conceived a counterplot as his words probably indicate. Let the nefarious work go on. It shall be sport to

have the engineer hoisted with his own petard. He shall delve below the mine and blow them to the moon. Cunning shall be met with cunning. His assured success he contemplates in fancy, and smiling informs his mother:

“O, ’tis most sweet
When in one line two crafts directly meet.”

The expression seems to indicate what is afterwards disclosed that he would have another craft sail after, and meet in open sea the royal ship on which he was bound for England.

After uttering the last good-night to his departing mother, he starts to drag the corpse away, but pauses a moment to speak an epitaph over the dead counselor; this foolish prating knave has in death what he lacked in life, silence, secrecy, and gravity.

ACT FOURTH

SCENE FIRST

INTERCHANGING MOVEMENTS

The accidental slaying of Polonius wrought many changes, and with them the Fourth Act is wholly concerned. Hamlet's premature and fatal stroke was an error which arose from his failure to hold tenaciously to the fixed course which reason and conscience had prescribed. Accident alone had fortunately saved him from ruining through blind fury the one sole purpose of his existence. His blunder impels him to resolve upon a more firm adhesion to his predetermined course, and to proceed with redoubled foresight and caution.

The first consequence of his error, is the necessity of consenting to be hurried away from Denmark, as a dangerous madman, even though he foresees that such enforced absence will halt his sworn purpose. Aware that Claudius, after penetrating his disguise and suspecting its probable purpose, will strain every nerve to rid himself of a dangerous avenger, he must now more than ever guard against his uncle's villainies. Though he be shut off from an opportunity of adopting some new method of disguise, he perceives it helpful for the present to continue in the role of a madman, even if it be somewhat worn and less serviceable. It will shield him in the public eye from responsibility for the slaying of Polonius and, moreover, offer the King a reasonable excuse for sending him abroad.

Certain critics who seem forgetful of Shakespeare's legerdemain in the apparent lengthening out of the drama, as

already shown²³ assert that its action limps in the Fourth Act, and at the beginning of the Fifth. A little reflection, we think, will show that it is precisely here that new tragic and dramatic elements enter and hurry us on to the end. Hamlet's error is the turning point of the drama, and upon it hinge all subsequent events. The Prince, hitherto, on the offensive, and the King on the defensive, now change places. The error of the former has roused the latter to aggression, and at once Claudius enters upon a role most fatal to himself, while to the avenger the most propitious and decisive of results. Of the dual movement of the drama, the first comes to rest, when the assailant had well nigh paralyzed his cause; the second, which is of no less importance than the first, begins with the Fourth Act, wherein the king, who is next to Hamlet the most important character, dominates the action, and discloses himself in the genuine colors of a criminal. These two interchanging movements now constitute the action of the drama. Neither Hamlet nor Claudius understands and controls them.

THE KING'S ALARM

In the meanwhile, Claudius had been pacing in anxiety his private apartment, impatiently awaiting the return of Polonius, who had promised to bring him without delay an unbiased report of the secret meeting between Hamlet and his mother. But instead of the minister, the Queen enters hastily in profound agitation. Her evident distress, marked by sighs and heaving bosom, almost deprives her of speech, as she stands before her expectant but astonished husband.

"Where is your son?" exclaims Claudius in alarm.
"What is the cause of your strange and violent emotion?"

"Ah, my lord," gasps Gertrude, "you know not what a horrid thing I have seen to-night."

²³ Chap. VI, p. 51.

“What?” demands Claudius amazed and suspicious.
“Gertrude, tell me, how does Hamlet?”

True to her promise, she follows Hamlet's injunction to maintain belief in his madness, and with maternal ingenuity gives the King a distorted account of the killing of Polonius. Naturally suppressing the fact that Hamlet had intended the stroke for Claudius, she insists on his genuine madness: he is “mad as the sea and wind when both contend which is the mightier.”

“O heavy deed!” replies the King, who is not deceived. Armed with fuller knowledge than the Queen supposes, he exclaims in deep concern: “It would have been so with us had we been there. Roaming at large in full liberty Hamlet is a constant menace to us all. Alas, how shall I answer this bloody deed? It will be charged to me, and justly so, since, foreseeing the danger, I should have kept this mad young man tethered in restraint. But my great love for him,” continues Claudius in hypocrisy, “blinded me to what was proper. Where has he gone?”

“To carry off the corpse,” replies the Queen. She does her best to allay her husband's great perturbation. She places her son's rash conduct in favorable light, and resorting to fiction, asserts that she left him weeping over his mad and luckless act.

“O, Gertrude, come away!” exclaims Claudius. “The sun of the morrow shall no sooner touch the mountain peaks than we shall ship him hence. With all our majesty and skill we must defend and excuse his murderous deed before the people. Ho, Guildenstern!”

In quick response both spies enter and listen to the king's command: “Go, get assistance and seek out Hamlet. In madness he has killed Polonius and dragged his corpse away. But mark you, treat him gently and address him kindly.

Haste away, I pray you, and bring the body to the chapel."

The spies departed. Claudius in mental disturbance expresses his fear of the populace. "Come away," he says to Gertrude. "Our wisest councelors must be instantly called together to learn of the untimely act and what we mean to do. We must assure them of the Prince's actual madness, and so explain his strange antics at the Play, as well as the killing of Polonius, and further how in tender love and solicitude we have arranged to send him abroad for change of scene and treatment. So, mayhap, forestalling public clamor and suspicion, we may keep our name untainted by poison-winged slander. O, Gertrude, come away!

"My soul is full of discord and dismay."

SCENE SECOND

THE KING'S SPONGES

At the command of Claudius, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern hastened away to discover where Hamlet had concealed the corpse of Polonius. Hearing their loud calls, the Prince exclaims: "But soft, what noise? who calls on Hamlet?" On turning he perceives the young spies approaching, and, in deep resentment at their continuous dogging of his steps, utters the sarcastic words, "O, here *they* come."

If on account of former friendship he had on previous occasions treated them with some deference and respect, his attitude towards them is now wholly changed. For a time the spies had attempted to conceal their official role, and, under the assumption of continued friendly relations, were careful to use kindly words and show obsequious deference. But after Hamlet had forced upon them his knowledge of their real purpose at Court, they were less exact in maintaining their disguise. Intruding their unwelcome presence more frequently upon him, they questioned him more directly, boldly, and brusquely than the Prince was accustomed to permit.

Hamlet on his part considered their shameful betrayal of his friendship for the royal favor a treacherous act, which cancelled every claim to his affection and respect. In consequence, he looked upon them as more or less open enemies whose presence was more than ever hateful, and whom he trusted as much as "adders fanged." Hence in the present instance he treats them with marked discourtesy, scorns their questions, and addresses them in expressly offensive terms.

When Rosencrantz enters hurriedly, and without cere-

mony demands in heated words: "What have you done with the dead body?" Hamlet in mock gravity replies: "I have compounded it with dust to which it is akin."

But, as Rosencrantz continues to question him with the same boldness and insistency, the Prince asserts his dignity and their unworthiness by demanding how the Royal Dane should reply to a sponge.

Rosencrantz feels the stinging force of the offensive appellation, and in the assertion of his honor asks in resentment, "Take you me for a sponge, my lord?"

"Ay, sir," answers Hamlet: "you are sponges that soak up information for the King," and against their rising anger, he insists all the more offensively upon the irritating epithet. The hateful comparison of the spies with a sponge was no doubt borrowed from Suetonius, who in his life of Vespasian narrates that, when reproached for appointing unworthy persons to high office, the emperor replied, such men, like sponges, served him well: when they had drunk their full, they were then fittest to be pressed.

Again in galling sarcasm Hamlet compares the spies to food which the royal ape stowes away in the corner of his jaws; the first to be mouthed and the last to be swallowed. When Rosencrantz parries the opprobrious comparison by feigning not to understand him, Hamlet rejoices in their stupidity:

A jest's prosperity lies in the ear
Of him that hears it, never in the tongue
Of him that makes it. (Love's Labor Lost, V. ii.)

The last shaft which he hurls, barbed with irony, lies in the proverb that a knavish or cunning remark never enters a fool's head, and they indeed are fools, since they do not realize their base and contemptible position.

The spies, in anxiety to cut off further parley, again insist

on learning where the body of Polonius is, and inform Hamlet that he must go with them to the King. He, however, continues to maintain his role of madness and, ignoring their eager questions, designedly talks nonsense, speaks in riddles to tease and puzzle them, and, with the purpose of mystifying them, resorts to phrases of subtle meaning. Playing on the words body and king, he affirms that the King's body is with the King, but not the King's soul, that is, Claudius—a king of shreds and patches—is devoid of the characteristics of a king, or of true kingliness, because he has not the soul of a king. To further mystify and astound them, he asserts that the King is a thing.

The sentence is left unfinished, because he is interrupted by Guildenstern who in astonishment exclaims, "What, my lord, the King a thing!"

"Ay, sir," replies Hamlet, "a thing of nothing, a thing of no value; bring me to him." The thought was perhaps suggested by the words of Job: "Man cometh forth like a flower and is destroyed and fleeth as a shadow," or mayhap by those of the royal prophet: "Man is like to vanity: his days pass away like a shadow."

In departing, Hamlet invites the spies to play the game of hide and seek: the fox indeed is now hidden, let all set off to find him. He could have used no term more appropriate for the foxy politician; of all animals, the fox is reputed the most cunning, and of this trait in particular Polonius had plumed himself the most.²⁴

²⁴ The appropriateness of the term again appears, when we consider that, as already noted, Polonius was a burlesque of the aged prime minister Burghley, who was known as the "Old Fox".

SCENE THIRD

A CHERUB THAT SEES THEM

The King enters, accompanied by armed attendants. The discovery that only by chance he had escaped the fatal blow which fell on Polonius, has filled him with fear and dismay, and caused him to surround himself more than ever with trusty body-guards. In soliloquy he gives expression to his distracting thoughts and feelings. Until yesterday he had imagined himself enjoying the fruits of his crime in full security; but the revelation that his secret murder was known to Hamlet, was a rude awakening to his danger, and impelled him to provide for his safety by taking at once aggressive measures against the probable avenger. Like Macbeth, he thinks, "to be thus is nothing, but to be safely thus." To let this madman go loose is most dangerous. Disease grown desperate demands a desperate remedy. But to avoid stirring up popular discontent, and perhaps inciting to riotous tumult, he decides to proceed smoothly and to disguise his purpose. If for his own personal safety, he must hurry his nephew out of Denmark, he must also satisfy the public that his action is not prompted by malice or caprice, but by the mature deliberation of his councilors. For this purpose he had hastily assembled his "wisest friends" for consultation. Having considered the accidental slaying of Polonius and its painful circumstances, the council decided, for prudential reasons, to suppress all the facts and to inter him as hastily and secretly as possible. Concerning Hamlet's fate, opinions were more divided. However much the King desired at heart to rid himself of his nephew, either by confinement in an asylum upon a judicial sentence of insanity, or

by summoning him before a court of justice to answer for the slaying of Polonius, he was equally averse to either course. The latter was objectionable on the part of the councilors, who, on the score of insanity, held Hamlet unamenable to the criminal law; and on the part of Claudius, who feared that a public and judicial process might lead Hamlet to divulge the secret crime. Besides, either process would arouse the opposition of the Queen and the masses; the Prince is the idol of Denmark and the most beloved of the 'distracted' or thoughtless multitude, which, ruled, not by judgment or reason, but by popular fancy and prejudice, weighs not the crime, but the punishment of the criminal. The only prudential course remaining is approved by every councilor: let the Prince be sent abroad for a time, until the fickle multitude shall have forgotten the deplorable death of the old minister. This expedient was instantly approved by the King, whose astute mind quickly grasped the opportunity to rid himself forever of the sole obstacle to his complete happiness.

While Rosencrantz with troubled mien enters to complain of Hamlet's refusal to disclose the hidden corpse, Guildenstern remains in the vestibule, awaiting the pleasure of the King. As soon as Claudius hears of the failure of his agents, he is surprised and angered, and summons the culprit before him. As the Prince enters in the actual custody of military guards, he is haughtily and peremptorily ordered to give the desired information. Hamlet, however, assumes the same temper as his uncle, and only perplexes him by harassing replies. In fancy, he already sees the corpse of the chancellor, the food of worms in the corruption of the grave. But worms, he assumes, which feed on the corpse of so distinguished a political wire-puller, must needs partake of his qualities and become political. The idea suggests a pun, and, Shakespeare indulging his propensity, plays on the words "diet" and "worms," in

allusion to the Diet which Charles convoked at Worms in 1521. No two words were better known to audiences of the Poet's day; it was common knowledge that the emperor had summoned the contumacious monk to Worms to defend himself before the national Diet, or convocation of all the princes and rulers of the German empire.²⁵

From punning, Hamlet turns to assure Claudius that he as well as all creatures shall, like Polonius, meet the same inevitable fate. A "fat king" like Claudius shall have the same end as a lean beggar; both shall be of service to the worms, though in a variable diet. By other personal remarks, Hamlet further irritates the King, who, returning to the insistent question, angrily demands, "where is Polonius?"

Hamlet's sole reply, though witty, is most cuttingly sarcastic, and indicates his contemptuous loathing for the royal criminal. Distinguishing between heaven and the lower regions, he counsels Claudius to look for Polonius in heaven, but he must send a messenger; since he himself can find no entrance there. If Polonius, however be in the other place, the King need send no messenger; for he himself will find glad welcome in hades.

When Claudius orders attendants to hasten away in search of the corpse, Hamlet in mock gravity assures him that neither need he worry nor they make haste, since Polonius will stay till they come. The attendants departed, the King turns to Hamlet, and, after expressing great grief at his bloody deed, begins to unfold his new project. Deeming himself secure in the secrecy of his purpose, he pleads that, in tender care for the Prince's special safety, he is obliged to despatch him instantly to England. His subterfuge is indeed most plausible,

²⁵ At Worms, a city of the grand duchy of Hesse, many important German Diets were convoked through the centuries. The term "Diet" was applied to several political bodies of medieval and modern Europe.

and so insistent is he on the benevolence of his intentions, that Hamlet, had he been a madman, would never have detected them. His acute mind, however, penetrates the criminal's villainous hypocrisy, and, in sarcastic reply, he affirms, "I see a cherub that sees your purpose." His costly error has taught him that in the accomplishment of his heavenly appointed duty, he must rely less upon his own efforts and more upon the higher guidance of the "Divinity that shapes our ends."

His brief reference to angels and the implied assurance of their aid is full of significance. It reveals a supernatural faith, which inspires him with the confidence that, in carrying out the mandate of the purgatorial spirit, he will have angels fighting in his cause. They are the agents of God, the ministers of His grace, and the guardians of men. Since they are on his side, why need he fear results? He may defy the treachery of his uncle. "This beauteous and sudden intimation of heavenly insight and interference against the insidious purpose of the king's show of regard for Hamlet's welfare," says Caldicott, "flashes upon us with a surprise and interest rarely to be found, and worthy of this great master of the drama."

THE KING'S TREACHERY

"Come, for England!" exclaims Hamlet, and, on departing from the royal presence, he accentuates his ill-feeling towards his uncle by ignoring him, and bidding farewell to his mother only, even though she be absent. She is the only tie that binds him to his native land. His words prompt the king to suggest a farewell also to his "loving father;" but the Prince in scornful emphasis spurns his show of treacherous affection, rejects his claim of father, and reiterates his first farewell. By a witty subterfuge, he escapes even a seeming courtesy to the hated criminal:

Ham. Come; for England! Farewell, dear mother.

King. Thy loving father, Hamlet.

Ham. My mother: father and mother is man and wife;
man and wife is one flesh, and so, my mother. Come,
for England! (Exit.)

His words take for granted the indissoluble bond of Christian marriage: "Wherefore shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife, and they shall be two in one flesh. Therefore now, they are not two, but one flesh. What therefore, God hath joined together, let no man put asunder." "So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself; for no man hateth his own flesh." A man cannot be divided from himself.²⁶ Hamlet's words indicate the good old Catholic doctrine, which ruled in his day, as it did throughout Christendom before the misinterpretation of Christian truths by the religious reformers of northern Europe in the sixteenth century.

Hamlet had met the haughty questions of the King with equal imperiousness. His offensive allusions and comparisons, heightened by resistless withering scorn, and intensified by his ferocity of attack, humiliated Claudius, filled him with rankling pain, and roused him, though outwardly composed before the court, to secret indignation and to new fears and alarms. If Hamlet's offensive words, as well as his fierceness, seemed pardonable to the courtiers, who imagined him demented, the King, who alone knew the true situation, realized their dangerous significance; they were the words of a son who was even now bent on avenging the murder of his father. He might strike at any unguarded moment; and the thought fills him with a most unroyal panic. In consequence, yielding to his fears, he

²⁶ Ephes. V, 25.—1 Thess. IV, 3-5.—Gen. II, 24.—Matt. IX, 6.—Mark, X, II-12.—Luke, XVI, 18.—Rom. VII, 2-3.

excitedly commands his attendants to pursue the Prince, to follow close on his heels, to lure him aboard ship, and away with him from Denmark that very night.

Events are crowding fast upon each other; but yesterday, Hamlet had unmasked the crime of Claudius, and on the same evening had slain Polonius; and in consequence he must now on the morrow quietly submit to be sent away to England. Those critics who imagine that a simple sword-thrust is all that is implied in the revenge of Hamlet, are apt to agree with Gervinus, when he asserts: "Hamlet's failure of vengeance must now compel him to act at last most powerfully in earnest." "Just the reverse is true," says Werder, "if any thing could occur to bring him to his senses, to impress upon him the necessity of checking the pace of his task, it is this failure, this misthrust." It has proved him in the eyes of Claudius, a dangerous madman, who should be confined, watched, and kept from doing further harm.

Though by his blunder, he has put himself in the power of the enemy, he sees that the King, fearing to aim directly at his life, will resort to strategy; but in this game he feels confident of outplaying his opponent. Swift to interpret the purpose of Claudius and his secret agents, he is as ready in a counterplot. It is to his advantage to accompany them; at home he shall be daily plagued by the hateful presence of the King's guards, who now accompany his every step. By sailing, he shall rid himself of them, and, moreover be free to discover the nefarious plot, to outwit the criminal, and to obtain a tangible proof of the intended crime with the view of using it against him. From this time on, neglecting the role of lunacy, save in his strife with Laertes at Ophelia's grave, he acts with energy, and stands every ready on a watchful defence. Hitherto he had marred his project by

too much reliance on his own devices and strength, now he will rely more upon the aid of Divine Providence.

As soon as the royal attendants, hurrying after Hamlet, had left the King alone, he unbosoms himself of his secret design to murder Hamlet. Unlike Macbeth, who by nature open, direct, and honest, rushes only from impulse into blundering crime, Claudius, by nature malicious, indirect, and feline, reveals himself an undoubted sleek, cunning, calculating, coldblooded, and smiling villain. Panic-stricken by fear, his mind is tortured with anxious doubts whether the tributary king of England will heed his murderous request. The sentence of death contained in the sealed document is, he thinks, clear enough, and direct, and just. The culprit, under pretence of madness, had murdered an innocent old man, the Chancellor of State, and even now breathes forth murder against himself as well as others. Unable, by reason of the murderer's rank and influence, to proceed legally against him at home, he, therefore, on the authority of Denmark's admitted suzerainty, commands England's vassal king to execute the criminal secretly without further shift. To allay his misgivings, Claudius in soliloquy invokes several reasons why the vassal king should not disregard his urgent command. While lives the Prince, his frame shall be racked with feverish fears:

“For like the hectic in my blood he rages,
And thou must cure me; till I know 'tis done,
Howe'er my haps, my joys were ne'er begun.”

The scene shows a notable change in Claudius. His recent attempt at repentance had been prompted more by fear than by compunction of heart; hence, when it brought him face to face with the absolute conditions of forgiveness, he turned his back on heaven, and henceforth, abandoned by divine grace, he proceeds from bad to worse. As Macbeth

reached the crisis in the murder of Banquo, so does Claudius in the attempted murder of Hamlet. Both, having determined to retain the crown at any cost, plot other murders without remorse of conscience; and these hurry them on blindly to their doom.

SCENE FOURTH

IN MENTAL CONFLICT

The Fourth Scene is not found in the Folio, and some claim that, apart from its comparative feebleness, it is false and unnatural. But says Professor Werder:

“Surely not as a prisoner on the brink of exile, surrounded by royal guards, is there a motive for self-reproach. One thing is clear, unless Hamlet planned the subsequent piratical capture, the soliloquy is not only superfluous and contradictory, but even absurd.”

The scene, exclusive of the soliloquy, serves, however, a good purpose. If, according to a law of the drama, no new character may be dragged in at the close of a play, it is necessary that Fortinbras in some manner enter into the action of the tragedy. Hence, the young prince, to whom reference has been made in the First Act and again in the Second, is now personally introduced to us, as he leads his Norwegian troops in spectacular march through Elsinore on his way to the confines of Poland. The scene thus prepares us for the important role which, on his return from the war, he is destined to play at the close of the tragedy.

The reply of the captain that Fortinbras with an army of twenty thousand men, is marching against Poland to gain “a little patch of ground that in it has no profit but the name, and for which he would not give five ducats,” surprises Hamlet greatly, and he philosophizes upon the fact that so many men, tricked by fantasy and fame, fight unto death “for a plot of ground which is not tomb enough to contain the slain;” and that Fortinbras, “puffed up with divine ambition,” exposes himself to death “even for an egg-shell.”

Rightly to be great, he concludes, is not to fight for trifles. Fame is but a phantom; "the paths of glory lead but to the grave." His thoughts are those of Joan of Arc:

"Glory is like a circle in the water,
Which never ceaseth to enlarge itself
Till by broad spreading, it desperse to nought."
(Henry VI. 1. 1. ii.)

The project of the Norwegian prince prompts Hamlet to reflect upon his own position. His enforced inactivity compared with Fortinbras' freedom, rouses him again, as in former soliloquies, to violent agitation. In indignation and desire of "revenge," he is rent by conflicting sentiments. If, as on previous occasions, impassioned emotions breathe instant revenge, and strong contending principles draw him in opposite directions, higher feelings of justice and necessity retard and smother their violence.

This mental conflict is chiefly apparent at moments of great depression like the present, when some circumstance causing the fluctuating fires of passion to flame wildly up in him, he berates himself unduly as a coward of craven scruples, lagging in "revenge;" but his deep moral feelings, keen sensibilities, and quick and powerful intellect enable him to put down the passionate rebellion of his lower animal nature. The *man* in an irrational impulse goads the *super-man* to an instant stroke of revenge, and blindly urges him to throw consequences to the wind, to act as Laertes talks: "To Hell, allegiance! vows, to the blackest devil! conscience and grace to the profoundest pit!"

Hamlet, however, is not a feather-brained and unprincipled Laertes, and, precisely because he is not, a fierce, tugging, agonizing conflict rages between his higher and lower nature; and his feelings, terribly insurgent, clamor for the upper hand. To appease his dreadful heart-agony, the *man*

indulges in overwrought strains of self-reproach in the hope of speedy satisfaction, and, seemingly taking part with his riotous passion, goes to pleading its cause most vehemently against his higher self; but judgment, nevertheless, keeps the upper hand, and though he cannot silence his insurgent feelings, he can, and does overrule them by the power of his iron will. He differs again from Laertes; the latter, a youth of choleric temperament, is never troubled with scruples and a melancholy which induces apathy or indifference to action. Though Hamlet often does overcome his apathy by native energy of will, he is, nevertheless, confronted on each occasion, as in the present soliloquy, by an actual and greater impediment, which consists in the conscientious obligation of obtaining visible and material proofs of the King's guilt, before he strike the blow of "revenge."

In Hamlet, therefore, we here behold another of the many struggles of the *man* against the *superman*, which have been already pictured. It is a struggle of the natural against the supernatural man, of the lower animal nature against the higher in a clamorous demand for instant revenge. The natural man, knowing no law but that of blood, spurs him on to immediate action, and charges his reluctance and hesitation to cowardice and irresolution; for the lower or irrational nature, which is actuated solely by blind instincts and passions, can recognize in the superman's moral dictates of wise and prudent judgments, nothing but "craven scruples of thinking too precisely on the event." Hence, the Prince's torturing, mental conflict arises from his attempts to reconcile two conflicting impulses, and between them to preserve his own liberty of will and action in the pursuit of a just and adequate "revenge." In soliloquy he finds "examples gross as earth," which exhort him to action. There is the Norwegian prince whose martial spirit in a less noble cause

brands his own inaction as cowardice. But in the comparison Hamlet does injustice to himself; the parity fails in essential elements. Fortinbras may without scruples lead his troops to battle against an open foe in defense of a just and public cause according to the common laws of war; Hamlet on the contrary is urged in opposition to religious principles and his better judgment to strike down by an apparently illegal act the head of the State—a secret criminal—for a hidden crime which is known to himself alone, and for which he can offer in defense no tangible and material proof. Hence, their projects differ as much as night from day.

From Fortinbras' activity for a trifle, Hamlet turns to think of his own inactivity in a cause of greatest import. When honor is involved there is nothing trifling. Yet it is precisely this sense of honor that restrains his avenging arm. To strike the King before obtaining proofs, which will satisfy the public mind as to the justice of his act, is to forfeit his honor and gain the infamy of an assassin and ambitious regicide. Justice, however, is impossible through the ordinary courts of the realm: they are in complete control of the criminal who sways with absolute power. As a last resort, Hamlet must, therefore, seek it in the one only way possible. If, as the rightful king, he proceed in the cause of justice, and by reason of the supreme power vested in himself, he judge, and execute Claudius, the citizens of Denmark will, nevertheless, be the jurors, who will afterwards examine his proofs, and decide upon the justice of the execution. Aware, therefore, that he must pause in his "revenge," "when honor's at the stake," until he has the absolutely necessary proofs, Hamlet, in consequence, concludes the soliloquy with words: "O, from this time forth, my thoughts be bloody." If he cannot now strike the criminal, let bloody thoughts at least speed him on to the attainment of the needed proofs.

SCENE FIFTH

THE SWEET ROSE OF MAY

After Hamlet's departure for England, there is a lapse of some days, perhaps a whole week, before the opening of the fifth scene. Time is thus allowed for Laertes' return from Paris to attend his father's funeral. In the meanwhile Ophelia's mind has been wrecked by the loss of her father and her lover. In the words of Sir Joshua Reynolds,

“There is no part in this play in its representation on the stage more pathetic than this scene, which I suppose proceeds from the utter insensibility Ophelia has to her own misfortunes. A great insensibility, or none at all, seems to produce the same effect. In the latter case the audience supply what is wanting, and with the former they sympathize.”

In the Folios, the scene opens differently than in our modern received text. In the former, the *Gentleman* is supplanted by Horatio, who enters alone to plead with the Queen for an audience with the afflicted Ophelia. That such an arrangement is more appropriate, many critics think with Dr. Johnson, and of it Dr. Clarke affirms: “We think there is something exquisitely appropriate in making Hamlet's beloved friend, Horatio, the one who watches over and tenderly thinks for Ophelia, during the Prince's absence, and brings her to his mother alone.”

Ophelia seems to have been more or less neglected in her misfortune by all save Horatio, a man of noble soul and unpretending worth. His esteem and love of Hamlet, as well as her sad state, roused a sympathy which impelled him to seek a private audience with the Queen at Elsinore, and

there to expose the case of the afflicted maiden. At the Queen's emphatic refusal to admit the grief-stricken girl to her presence, he pleads her cause in few but forcible words. He discloses her lamentable state, and shows how her demands are importunate even to distraction. He describes pathetically and truthfully the marks of her madness both in words and action. "There's tricks in the world," she says, and she "speaks things in doubt," sometimes concerning her dead father, and sometimes concerning her dead lover; and evil-disposed listeners collect her broken thoughts and patch them together to fit their own evil suppositions; hence, he concludes that it is to the Queen's best interests to speak with the demented maiden, in order to hinder "ill-breeding minds" from hatching out dangerous conjectures of foul play. His conclusion wins not only the Queen's consent but, moreover, so stirs her conscience that, at his departure, she voices in remorse the sickness of her sin-stricken soul. Sin's nature is to turn every trifle into a prologue to some great calamity, and her guilty soul is filled with fears of greater ills.

Horatio returns, leading in Ophelia, and he it is who follows her away. She enters, according to the stage directions of the First Quarto, with her hair down, playing on a lute and singing. Horatio, speechless all the while amid her gentle ravings, allows the Queen to do the speaking. Of the maiden's plight, Vischer says:

"If ever it can be said of a poetical creation, that it has a fragrancy in it, it is this picture of the crazed Ophelia and the inmost secret of its bewitching fragrancy is innocence. Nothing deforms her; not the lack of sense in her sense, not the rude naïveté of those snatches of song; a soft mist, a twilight is drawn around her, veiling the rough reality of insanity."

The madness of this 'Rose of May' is turned to favor and to prettiness. The gloom of her affliction engenders an overpowering pathos. What can be sadder than her story? One tithe of Hamlet's woe overwhelms and shatters her young mind. By an inspired fitness, the Poet has banished her lover from the scene. His simulated madness, however much necessitated, would, in contrast with her absolute insanity, never have been able to survive the test.

NURSERY RHYMES

When Ophelia is conducted before the Queen, she seems at first not to recognize her, and gazing about in vacant stare, exclaims, "Where is the beauteous majesty of Denmark." The presence of her lover's mother anchors her wandering mind, and, all heedless of Gertrude's words, she begins to sing of him in snatches of old ballads. They come flowing in music from the silent halls of memory, where they had entered when perhaps her old nurse sang her to sleep in days of childhood. The first is the story of a maiden who inquires of a traveller concerning her lost lover. He may be known by "cockle hat, and staff, and sandal shoon." These were the honored insignia of religious pilgrims, who, in the fulfilment of holy vows or from devotion, journeyed to sacred shrines across the seas and often to the Holy Land. In those ages of Faith they not only afforded safety to the pious stranger in his wanderings through foreign regions, but even won for him the respect and honor due to a sacred personage. Hence, as a consequence of the common sacredness of the pilgrim's habit, lovers in their adventures sometimes resorted to its guise. The ballad was probably suggested by Hamlet's departure to a foreign clime. In Ophelia's mind all is disorder; ideas and phantasms mingle in confusion without sequence and distinctness. Afflicted over

the dual loss of her father and her lover, her stricken mind cannot perceive their objective difference, and with the death of the one she also mourns the death of the other.

Her reference to the legend of the baker's daughter discloses how the love of Hamlet and her filial love, had subsisted in her mind in conjunction with the cautions and fears which Polonius and Laertes had so indelicately avowed concerning the danger to her virtue. Though it is not certain that she had in her sanity seriously suspected the motives of her lover, yet the disagreeable aspersions of his honor were the burden of her thoughts; and now she reveals what a deep impression they had made upon her.

The legend had been often used in her early childhood to enkindle kind feelings for the poor and unfortunate. Such impressions, after others of later years have faded, remain still fresh in the memory of the insane, as well as of those in second childhood. The story, which is current to-day among the nursery tales of Gloucestershire, relates that the Savior in disguise entered a baker's shop, asking for some bread; and, when the baker charitably put a large piece of dough into the oven to bake for Him, his daughter rebuked him, and for her unkindness was changed into an owl. The idea of this sudden transformation prompts Ophelia to exclaim: "Lord, we know what we are, but know not what we may be." It no doubt suggested the thought of her own unkindness to Hamlet; for her equally heartless conduct had, she believed, made him insane. But as her heartlessness was due to obedience, her father's suspicions of her lover's motives now recall to her memory another ballad which recounts the somewhat analogous case of a man who with false vows had betrayed a too trusting maiden. The song she had heard in childhood when she did not understand its meaning. The stanza she sings to her Valentine she would rather have died

than sing when he lay at her feet in the Play; and she would not now sing it, were she not crazed by love.

The character of some of those ballads, thinks Hudson, is surprisingly touching. They tell us, as nothing else could do, that Ophelia is utterly unconscious of what she is saying. Their immodesty is not inconsistent with her purity, as all can testify who have had experience with insane patients.²⁷ The ballad she sings contains an allusion to an old custom according to which the first maiden seen by a man on February the fourteenth was considered his Valentine or true love for that year. Scott made it the basis of his plot in *The Fair Maid of Perth*.

From the thought of the wrong done by the false lover of the ballad, Ophelia comes to think of the evil done by her own lover in the slaying of her father, and in sorrow exclaims: "I cannot choose but weep, to think they should lay him in the cold ground." Her affliction recalls to mind the advice she had heard in younger years: "We must be patient" in suffering. "Let us hope all will be well." The memory of her father gives rise to the associated idea of Laertes, and she says: "my brother will know of it," and avenge it, "and so I thank you for your good counsel." These words, no doubt refer to his last farewell, when, before departing for Paris, he had cautioned her to have no further relations with the Prince. Then that counsel was most disagreeable, but now that Hamlet has slain her father, it seems wise and good. With a deep bow and a "good night sweet ladies," Ophelia quietly departs, leaving all lost in pity and bewilderment. The King alone breaks the solemn silence

²⁷ Dr. Strachey says: "If we bear in mind the notorious fact that in the dreadful visitation of mental derangement, delicate and refined women will use language so coarse that it is difficult to guess where they can ever even have heard such words; if we remember that mental fever quickens old forms into life, and consider that the infant ears of the motherless Ophelia might have heard the talk and the songs of such a nurse as that of Juliet, we shall find nothing improbable or even unseemly in the poor girl's songs"

by commanding the friend of her lover to follow after and to keep her from harm.

FEARS AND FOREBODINGS

Ophelia's parting reference to her brother found an echo in the King's soul, and awakened him to a sense of the troubles which were sure to come upon him, "not single but trooping in battalions;" and these he enumerates in historical order to the Queen. There is the death of Polonius; then too her son is gone, who is himself the "most violent author of his own just remove." Gertrude naturally supposes his equivocal words to refer to her son's temporary absence on the embassy; for Claudius alone knows the secret mandate within the sealed packet, and feels certain that her son is gone — gone forever. His third cause of fear arises from reflection on the fact that the people in wonderment at the sudden and secret manner of Polonius' death, are confused and voice their foul suspicions. It causes him to recognize his blunder, both in suppressing the circumstances of the old man's death, and in interring him clandestinely and hurriedly without the customary public honors due to a nobleman of the realm.

The action of Laertes, however, inspires him with the greatest fear. Holding himself aloof from the court, since his secret return from France, and concealing his intentions, he moves among the people, eagerly seeking information concerning recent wondrous events. As a consequence, many tale-bearers press about him and poison his mind with pestilential insinuations, buzzers who, though ignorant of the facts, do not scruple to charge the King with his father's death. Such and other secret information fill Claudius with anxiety and fears, and cause him to complain that evil forebodings, like "a murdering piece" of ordnance afflict him

with "superfluous," or imaginary death. In the original text the King concludes his speech with the following lines:

"O time, how swiftly run our joys away?
Content on earth was never certain bred.
To-day we laugh and live, to-morrow dead."

Claudius had scarce ceased speaking when he heard a loud and alarming noise outside the palace doors. The Queen in affright exclaims, "Alack, what noise is this?"—"Where are my Switzers," demands the King. "Let them guard the doors." The term Switzers, though originally signifying mercenary troops in the hire of a foreign monarch, had come, in Shakespeare's day, to be synonymous with the body-guard of a king of any country whatsoever.

What Claudius feared the most is at hand already. Without is a riotous multitude, which, in a wild uproar of many voices, clamors to see the King. Amid the commotion, a courtier enters in pallor and panic fear, and rushing forward shouts, "Save yourself, my lord!" With wild gestures and impassioned words he describes how like the ocean surging onward over the lowlands with impetuous rage, Laertes at the head of an angry mob of citizens has borne down the officers of state. In gathering numbers the mad rabble is crowding about the palace. On every side is heard the shout, "Laertes shall be King!" and with caps, hands, and tongues the cry is applauded to the skies. The Queen in anger at the news, exclaims, "O, you false Danish dogs!" How cheerfully you yelp and pursue the false trail!

We have hitherto seen little of Laertes, but now in the absence of Hamlet, he and the King dominate the action. Favorably impressed with him at his first brief appearance, our impression was, however, soon blurred by his own father, who in conversation with Reynaldo insinuated certain evil

traits which the son himself confirms, when at a later stage he unfolds his true character. Certain critics, however, are wont to magnify Laertes beyond his due. Admitting that his character is not exactly virtuous, they see in his love for his sister, a noble and exalting element. His affection is indeed commendable, and forms admittedly the sole redeeming trait in his character. But as the observance of one commandment will neither excuse nor atone for the violation of the other nine, so neither will a love which is instinctive, and common to mortals, and, therefore, not a distinctive trait of Laertes, wash into whiteness a character which, in the following scenes, the Poet paints in colors of indelible blackness.

When facing Laertes and the mob, Claudius appears to the best advantage in the revelation of certain nobler qualities of his character. We are apt to take too absolutely Hamlet's low estimate of the King, all forgetful, perhaps, that this estimate is altogether based on his uncle's shameful depravity. Hamlet's keen appreciation of moral good inspires an intense loathing of moral evil, which so blinds him to the good graces and qualities of the king that he sees no redeeming element in the hated moral monster. Moreover, the perversity of Claudius, which, from the circumstances of the Play, is more openly exposed and emphasized, is wont to obscure whatever natural good qualities he possesses, and to leave us but a one-sided view of a many-sided character. This may explain why, unfortunately, the role of Claudius is usually assigned to an inferior actor, who from want of proper interpretation of the King's strength, keen intellectual powers, and fascination, impersonates him so imperfectly as to nullify that subtle balance, which, when preserved, is one of the greatest ornaments of the Play. Though a moral degenerate of a coarse and sensual nature, the usurper is

delineated as physically graced with commanding qualities, which make him a strong man among strong men. Recalling his unvaried kingly bearing and forceful command of respect; his cunning and discerning mind, which is quick of judgment and rich in resources; his ingratiating ease of manners and strange powers of fascination, by which he seduced the Queen and won over to his cause all save the Prince; and lastly his fearlessness in braving the maddened Laertes and the roaring mob behind him: we see qualities that indicate, not a weakling, but a strong dramatic personality which is rendered still more formidable by an absolute possession of supreme power. Such a man is Claudius, and in his hands, the brave Laertes becomes henceforth the mere plaything of his will.

STORMING THE PALACE

After Laertes with his adherents had gathered a great concourse in the public square, he harangued them upon his fancied wrongs, and, having roused them to turbulent excitement, led them on, a roaring mob, to the royal palace, in the hope of intimidating the King into granting him immediate justice. At the wild commotion of the tumult without, the Switzers had quickly bolted every door, and stood on guard within; but the surging, roaring mob broke down every barrier, and forced their way into the very presence of the King. At the head was Laertes, who in the height of frenzy rushed with drawn sword before Claudius, shouting in angry words, "O, thou vile King, give me my father!"

His very presence is sufficient to allay the alarm of the King. The thought that the much-dreaded conspiracy has resulted only in an open and harmless manifestation of anger in an excited but fickle mob, has brought relief and assured him of his safety. Thoroughly cognizant of Laertes' charac-

ter and his own influence over him, as well as of the helplessness of an unorganized mob in the face of his trusted troopers, Claudius maintains his royal dignity unflattered, and greets him with fearless composure. The King's unruffled conduct and unimpassioned words urging calmness, not only surprise Laertes, but even rouse him in irritation to further expression of his anger. The King, however, remains undisturbed, and commands Gertrude to release her hold upon Laertes. The Queen had lost self-possession, and from fear of violence on the part of the mad youth, had rushed between her husband and his aggressor, and seized the arm of the latter to prevent his use of the sword.

Claudius now proceeds to reason calmly with Laertes. He quietly assures him of the futility of any attempt against his royal person; "for a king is surrounded by such a body-guard of heavenly protectors, that traitors can only peep through their ranks, and get a distant view of the king, who remains beyond the reach of real harm." His words are based on the notion of the divine right of kings. It was a sentiment common in Shakespeare's day, and appears to have been held by the Poet himself.

Laertes in open-eyed surprise is dumbfounded at the king's assurance, and his silence is broken only by the King's command to speak. His sole query is, "Where is my father?" The death of Polonius, and its attending circumstances, as well as his hasty burial, had been kept a secret of the court: hence Laertes had no further knowledge than that based on floating rumors and suspicions. Claudius, however, in the consciousness that Laertes is subdued, changes front, and, interrupting the Queen, exclaims in bold ironical defiance. "Let him demand his fill." His defiance rouses Laertes to the fact that his anger has been cooling, and that his cause is slipping from him. To regain lost ground, he

labors to inflame his wrath anew by more exaggerated and violent expressions than he used before:

“I’ll not be juggled with. To hell, allegiance! Vows, to the blackest devil! Conscience and grace, to the profoundest pit! I dare damnation. I’ll be revenged.”

But Claudius knows his man, and sure of his power, again calmly questions him in sarcastic terms, “Who shall stay you!” The reply of Laertes is as feeble as was his threat to tax his resources to their utmost, and is utterly ignored by the King.

Following up the advantage gained, Claudius begins to reason coolly with Laertes as a friend. Why in his wild desire for revenge, should he proceed indiscriminately against friend and foe? Is it just that in the blind torrent of his rage, he should act like a gambler who sweeps away the stakes, no matter whether the point is in his favor or against him? Laertes protests that his action is solely against his enemies. To his friends he will be faithful, and will even prove his friendship, as the pelican, at the cost of his life’s blood. The pelican was a fabulous bird, which according to popular belief, was supposed to feed its young with its own heart’s blood. As the legend was commonly employed to symbolize extraordinary love, it was naturally adopted in early Christian times as a sacred emblem, which fittingly bespoke the Savior’s supreme love for man in the Holy Eucharist. When, however, in the religious revolution of the sixteenth century, the sacrifice of the Mass was declared idolatrous, and prohibited under grave penalties by act of Parliament, the long established Catholic meaning of the symbol, which was well-known in the Poet’s day, soon, under the influence of the new religion, fell into disfavor, and was supplanted by the vague meaning of self-sacrifice in general.

Shakespeare's fondness for the symbol appears from his use of it in *King Lear* and *Richard II.*²⁸

Observing that the deep wrath of Laertes has been allayed, the King commends his good sense, approves him "a good child and a true gentleman," and offers to satisfy him with proofs, as clear as sunlight, of his own innocence of Polonius' death. Their conversation is interrupted by the noisy Danes without who, in making way for Ophelia, cry in loud voices, "Let her come in."

A DOCUMENT IN MADNESS

The action of Ophelia in this her last appearance is, in absence of stage directions by the Poet, a matter of conjecture. The role, as commonly enacted at the present day, has been described as follows:

"Ophelia enters with her hair and whole figure entwined with chains of flowers; and in her thin outer skirt, she carries a mass of them. She advances slowly with the strange light of insanity in her eyes, sits down upon the floor, and plays with the flowers in a childish way, as she sings. Then she arises, distributes rosemary, pansies, fennel, columbine and rue, sings her last song, loiters a moment after her parting benediction, and runs out in a burst of mad laughter."

The pitiful plight of Ophelia startles Laertes into voicing his deep sentiments of affection. Though his animosity towards the King in person has sensibly ceased, he again yields to thoughts of violence and resentment, and swears anew to revenge himself for her sad affliction. Never having understood the sister whom he so dearly loved, nor having known her real and deep affection for the lord Hamlet, he wonders why "a young maiden's wits" should be as frail "as an old man's life." Hence supposing her dementia to

²⁸ *Lear* III, 4, 77. — *Rich.* II, 2, 126.

be solely due to her father's death, he concludes that love, when existing in natures most sensitive and refined like Ophelia's, causes reason to follow after the object beloved.

Listless and regardless of her brother's words, Ophelia begins to sing mere fragments of old ballads, as her memory recalls them at haphazard from the long ago. Meaningless refrains were common to these old songs, as is seen from their frequent recurrence in many of Shakespeare's plays. The music of the refrain she sings, seems by association of phantasms, to awaken memories of her childhood, when she had often heard her nurse sing the same ballad to the hum of the spinning-wheel. Of the song itself, nothing save what the text affords, has come down to us.

Whether in the distribution of flowers to the members of the court, Ophelia gave them out as they came to hand, or whether she chose a particular flower suitable to each person, is open to conjecture; neither in the text, nor by any stage direction has the Poet left us any certainty. By a long established custom, however, which has become a fixed stage tradition, Ophelia assigns rosemary to Hamlet, who is present to her imagination; she gives pansies to Laertes; fennel and columbines to Claudius; and rue to the Queen and herself. On this passage, Hunter annotates:

"Ophelia in unbalanced mind thinks of marriage; with it comes the idea of rosemary, and she addresses him who should have been the bridegroom, Hamlet himself, as her lover. She then feels her disappointment. Hamlet is not there, and she turns to another flower—the pansy, or heart's ease—as more fitting her condition; for the pansy is associated with melancholy."

When the mind is unsettled, it is usual for some idea to recur which has been introduced at a critical period of one's life. Now when Laertes was warning Ophelia against encouraging the attentions of Hamlet, he urged her to con-

sider them as trifling, and his love but a violet in the youth of primy nature. These words, imprinted on her mind in association with the idea of Hamlet and her brother, are now recalled when she again converses with her brother on the same unhappy subject. Violets represent faithfulness, and they all withered, when her lover by the slaying of her father, had interposed a final obstacle to her union with him.

The language of flowers is very ancient, and was to Ophelia, like to most young maidens, a fond subject of study. Rosemary is emblematic of remembrance, and was distributed and worn at weddings, as well as at funerals. The pansy is a symbol of thought, of pensiveness, and of grief. The daisy represents faithlessness and dissembling. Fennel designates flattery, or cajolery and deceit; and columbine, ingratitude; and these two flowers Ophelia befittingly presents to the guileful and faithless Claudius. Rue is a bitter plant with medicinal qualities, and was in folk lore a symbol of repentance. She calls it "an herb of grace on Sundays;" because the wearer when entering a church on that day, dipped his rue in Holy Water, which always stood within the portals, and blessed himself with it, in the hope of obtaining God's "grace" or mercy. "There's rue for you," she says to the Queen, and "here's some for me." The Queen, however, is to wear hers with a difference, that is, in token of repentance, while she will wear it in regret and grief at the loss of her father and her lover. In the distribution, the demented maiden is seen naïvely but unwittingly to choose the flower most suited to each person.

In Ophelia's deranged mind, thoughts of Hamlet and her father incoherently commingle. After singing "For bonny sweet Robin is all my joy," a line from a ballad of Robin Hood, she passes to another in memory of her father, and dwells with satisfaction upon the words, "They say he made

a good end.” The expression may seem meaningless to the uninitiated; but to the Catholic they are richly significant. Those, whose religion offers them no sacraments of the dying, have often been puzzled by the fact that Catholics, when dangerously ill, are so insistent in the call for the ministrations of a priest. On hearing of a friend’s death, the first question which a Catholic eagerly asks, is “how did he die?” or “did he make a good end?” or “did he receive the last sacraments?” These are all one and the same question. The readiness is all. If the deceased, contrite of heart, was, in the confession of his sins, absolved from them by the power of the keys which the Savior entrusted to His Church; if thus properly disposed, he received the Eucharistic Body of the Lord, the pledge of his salvation and future resurrection; and if he peacefully departed from this world, with the last sacred Unctions of Holy Church, his friends feel consoled in the hope, which greatly mitigates their grief, that, having died in the grace and friendship of God, the soul of the departed has found mercy at the tribunal of justice in the spirit world. This is well illustrated by the words of the ghost; Hamlet’s father complained, not so much of the murder, as of the fact that he had been deprived of the last sacramental rites of Holy Church:

Cut off even in the blossoms of my sin,
Unhousl’d, disappointed, unaneled,
No reckoning made, but sent to my account
With all my imperfections on my head;
O, horrible! O, horrible! most horrible!

Had Ophelia known the circumstances of her father’s death, she would have felt more poignant grief; but her friends concealing them, sought to soothe her by the assurance that “he made a good end.” This assurance with all

that it means, she herself makes repeatedly the one element of consolation in her grief; for though demented, she still is mindful of the Catholic doctrine of purgatory, and, accordingly, at the close of the ballad she prays that "God may have mercy" on her father's soul, as well as on "all Christian souls," and uttering the parting greeting, "God be with you," she departs from the scene, leaving all affected with pity and commiseration.

Ophelia's sad condition had sensibly stirred Laertes to great affliction, and the King pretending to share his grief, attempts to soothe his feelings: let him summon his wisest friends to sit with him in council in the judgment of his griefs. Before them he shall lay the facts, and if they adjudge him guilty of Polonius' death, he is ready to forfeit life and crown in atonement; if guiltless, then Laertes should be patient; since even then, he will cooperate with him in the work of his revenge. Laertes approves the design, but declares that even though the King be innocent, yet the secret cause of his father's death and the denial of a public funeral with all the honors customary to his station, are grievances which in voices loud cry to heaven for redress and punishment. Claudius wisely admits the offense to be grievous, and laconically replies, "Let the great axe fall" upon the neck of the offender. That it would so fall upon Hamlet, the King had little doubt; but at present, he deemed it inopportune and even unwise to communicate to Laertes his secret plot upon the Prince's life. He must in the meanwhile keep him busy in the proceedings of the proposed council, which, for one cause or another, he can protract for a few days, in the hope that the ambassadors who will soon return from England, shall testify to Hamlet's death. This fact assured, he can then secretly summon Laertes, and, summarily dispensing with further proceedings, satisfy his grievances and

thirst for revenge by exposing to him, how in furtherance of his cause, he had justly inflicted the death penalty upon the murderer of his father.

SCENE SIXTH

A SUCCESSFUL COUNTERPLOT

By disclosing in a brief interlude the unexpected issue of Hamlet's cruise to England, the Poet's evident design is to keep his hero before our mind. Sailors enter hurriedly. One of them after greeting Horatio with the salutation, "God bless you sir," gives him a secret letter "from the ambassador that was bound for England." The prayer of the sailor, as well as that of Horatio, is one of the many little touches that indicate Shakespeare's fidelity to traits of character. In those ages of faith, it was the common practice not only in "Merry England," but also throughout Christendom, to greet a friend at meeting, with a "God bless you," and at parting, with a "God be with you." These little prayers were prompted by a living faith, and though still in use among devout Christians, have in our day given way to various inane expressions.

The letter contains a graphic narration of Hamlet's strange capture by pirates and his safe return to Denmark. Those critics who assign Hamlet's delay of "revenge" to a defect of character, blame him for tamely submitting to be sent away when he should by all means have remained in Denmark to further the one purpose of his life. Hence, they prefer, in harmony with their theory, to imagine Hamlet's predicted undermining of the King's plot to consist in the mere altering of the secret letters and, so ignore his prearranged capture by a pirate ship: the latter, if admitted, would militate against their pet theory of Hamlet's inactivity and abandonment of self to fate.

The incident of the pirate ship, though indeed a strange occurrence, is little noticed by critics of the subjective school. As the event has, however, a marked influence upon the dramatic action, it merits some attention. The facts, though few, are clear; a so-called pirate ship overtakes the royal vessel and grapples with it; Hamlet alone leaps aboard the strange vessel; and instantly it cuts loose, and at once returns him safely to Denmark. The event thus briefly described, looks in itself so unusual and suspicious that, if occurring in real life, it would undoubtedly impress on every one the idea of collusion, and this idea is strengthened, when all the circumstances are weighed, as well as the fact that the capture verified certain guarded remarks which Hamlet previously had made. Viewed in this light, the incident appears as a prearranged counterplot—a theory which with no argument against it, is supported by such an accumulation of circumstantial evidence, as to beget, if not certainty, at least the highest probability.

What then was this counterplot? Was it, as some assert, nothing more than the altering of the secret letters? Such an hypothesis appears untenable for several reasons. Knowing that the thrust which killed Polonius was intended for himself, Claudius on the one hand felt assured that henceforth his own life depended on Hamlet's death. Hence, rich as he was in resources, quick of action, and thoroughly unscrupulous, he resolved upon a cunningly devised plot to destroy him. On the other hand, aware of the King's secret hostility and treacherous nature, Hamlet, alert, watchful, and on guard against any covert act, was all but certain that the embassy with sealed letters to the English monarch, was a perfidious design by means of which Claudius hoped to accomplish abroad what he dared not attempt at home. His penetrating mind foresaw that, though even now under constant guard at

Elsinore, his position would be far more dangerous on board a ship when in the hands of officers, acting under secret instructions of the King; that, if he were unable to obtain possession of the secret letters, he would, on landing in England, be hopelessly in the power of Claudius; that even were he successful with the letters, the spies might have secret oral orders for the English monarch, who in the dilemma of contradictory commands, would, in all likelihood, hold him a prisoner while awaiting further instructions from Denmark: all these, Hamlet perceived were contingencies, any one or all of which might probably be verified; and, therefore, it is not rational to assume that, in his customary foresight and caution, he would blindly walk into the trap of Claudius, make forever his sworn revenge impossible, and jeopardize his life by such an uncertain and dubious counterplot, as the mere possible substitution of the secret letters. What, moreover, militates most against the hypothesis, is the second scene of the last Act, wherein Hamlet himself, treating in full of the purloining of the secret letter and its substitution, makes it clear that it was not his prearranged counterplot. He expressly declares it to have been only an after-thought, a makeshift, which was forced upon him by stress of unexpected circumstances, as shall be explained in the proper place.

What then was Hamlet's predicted counterplot? Clearly, it was one that engendered a manifest confidence of foiling the machinations of Claudius; one that would without delay restore him to Denmark, and to his pursuit of evidence against the criminal; one that prompted him, on hearing of the embassy from the King, to exclaim, "good," and again. "I see a cherub that sees them;" one that inspired him to confide to his mother the joy he felt at the certainty of success: "O, 'tis most sweet when in one line two *crafts* di-

rectly meet." The counterplot, therefore, in which Hamlet rejoiced so much, because he felt absolutely certain of its success, should be one which, if executed, would verify his predictions; but his prearranged capture by a pretended pirate ship alone seems to fulfill these conditions. In the text, he affirms that Claudius was marshalling him to knavery; but let him proceed, he says, in his treacherous work; his shall be the sport to delve beneath his mine, and hoist the engineer with his own petard; and in the vision of actual success, he rejoices at the meeting of the two 'crafts,' each on its own crafty mission bent.

Such a plot once decided upon, was with the aid of Horatio most easy of execution. Surely the Prince of Denmark could with ease charter secretly a warship, or cruiser; the navy of Denmark, as well as its merchant marine, dominated the high seas in those times; and, moreover, the warships of prince Fortinbras were then at anchor in the port of Elsinore. With the ship in commission, Hamlet could, before leaving port, readily give minute instructions to its officers, and make his promises of rich rewards dependent upon their faithful execution. Such a plot explains, not only his absolute confidence, which seems begotten of careful preparation, but also his surprising readiness and even glee at departing from the scene of his revenge, where interests dearer than life should naturally detain him.

The text, by means of Hamlet's letter, briefly yet clearly exposes the successful execution of the plot. The vessel which overtook him was evidently not a real, but a pretended pirate ship. If pirates are highwaymen who sail the high seas in quest of booty; if their trade is to pursue, and by force of arms to overpower merchant ships, and after plundering them, to destroy or sell them at open mart:

it appears surprising strange that in the present instance, the pirate ship simply grapples with its prey with the evident purpose of allowing Hamlet, who is on the watch, to leap aboard. That done, then instantly, forgetful of its pirate trade, it cuts loose, and, abandoning the royal ship and its rich booty without a fight on either side, retraces its course immediately, and bears the one desired prize back in safety to Denmark. The mystery, which surrounds the transaction, is cleared away by Hamlet himself, when he tells Horatio that they were, not piratical thieves, but thieves of mercy who knew what they were doing, for he was to do a good turn for them. Nothing further is manifestly wanting to show that the Prince's capture by the pretended pirate ship, was the successful execution of his predicted counterplot.

Hamlet's letter to Horatio is necessarily couched in cautious and ambiguous phrases. If it fell into the hands of the enemy, it would compromise both his friend and the officers of the pirate ship. It was, however, sufficiently clear to one who was a sharer in the stratagem; and its chief purpose was to assure him of its success and to demand his immediate presence. He has words to speak in his ear that will strike him dumb. They are too grave and alarming to commit to writing, and so he reserves them for a private interview. He has actually in his possession documentary evidence which proves that his uncle sent him to England with the sealed positive order that he be murdered there by proxy.

SCENE SEVENTH

IN SECRET CONFERENCE

We now come to a remarkable and vivid portrayal of the king's ingenious villainy. With crafty skill he forms and fashions Laertes to his nefarious will, as clay in a potter's hands. If in a former brief appearance, Laertes left a good impression, he now destroys it by actions which disclose his real character. Naturally impetuous, fiery of temperament, and ruled by passion rather than by reason, he reveals himself, on returning from his libertine life in Paris, as indifferent to noble ideals of honor and of justice, and willingly agrees to become the base tool of a crafty criminal. If, of the two conspirators, Claudius is the master villain, Laertes by his own suggestion of the use of poison, proves himself no mean adept in the ways of infamy.

By forcing upon our notice the deep contrast between Hamlet and Laertes, the Poet in the present scene seems intent upon a further glorification of his hero. If the one is characterized by a love of truth, sincerity, virtue, justice, and of all that is honorable; the latter in contempt of them all, enters ignobly into an alliance with falsehood, treachery, and crime. The whole scene is a strong sketch in black and white, in which the evil traits of Laertes, serve to illuminate all the more the nobility of Hamlet's nature.

The curtain rises on the two conspirators in secret conference. The King is supposed to have narrated to Laertes what the audience knows well already: namely, that in an attempt at his life, Hamlet had in mistake slain Polonius. In consequence, Claudius claims the friendship and alliance of

Laertes; since both are animated by the same purpose of revenge. Laertes, however, can not understand why the King, even when impelled by his own safety, did not vindicate the law against so capital an offence. Claudius assigns two reasons: the one on the part of Hamlet's mother, and the other on the part of the people. "The Queen lives almost by his looks," and, as a star can move only within its sphere, so was he held in check by her. On the other hand, "the general gender," or common people love him so highly that his faults seem graces in their eyes; and any attempt to punish or restrain him, would appear as so many injuries perpetrated against his innocence and good qualities: to put gyves upon him was only to endear him to the people.

Laertes in smothered feelings of disgust at the fears and weakness of the King, recounts his dual loss as motives for insisting on revenge, and in reference to his sister's perfections, makes a beautiful allusion to an olden ceremony at the coronation of the Kings of Hungary. It was customary for the newly-crowned monarch to stand on the Mount of Defiance at Pressburg, and unsheathing the sword of State, to extend it towards the four quarters of the globe, challenging the world the while to dispute his claim. Claudius in reply, protests that he is not a dull weakling to be branded with fear in face of danger; and when, in the hope of speedy news from the ambassadors, he proceeds to offer proof, he is interrupted by the sudden entrance of a messenger with letters for the King and Queen from the lord Hamlet.

In a refinement of irony, the letter to Claudius shatters his dream at the moment when he is gloating over the prospect of soon communicating to Laertes the news of Hamlet's execution. The letter, formal and diplomatic, informs him that Hamlet has returned alone to Denmark, and promises to recount to him on the morrow the occasion of his sudden

and strange return. The King, surprised and startled, is scarcely able to believe his eyes, and in sheer bewilderment turns to consult Laertes. He, though equally lost in surprise, rejoices at the news; the prospect of challenging on the morrow the slayer of his father causes his heart to glow still more with its mad sickness for revenge.

CONSPIRATORS

After Hamlet had delved *beneath* the King's mine, and exploded it, Claudius nonplussed, was at sea regarding his next move; but hearing Laertes' implied challenge of the Prince, he instantly grasped at a new plot which it suggested to his mind so astute and quick in treachery. It is, he informs Laertes, a device which cannot fail, nor will it stir even a breath of suspicion or of blame in the mind of the mother, who must needs charge her son's death to a chance stroke in the play of fencing. Laertes without hesitation and without a scruple assents to the King's murderous device, and, as Claudius expected, demands that he himself be the cause of Hamlet's death.

The King proceeds to explain how speciously he may arrange the desired fencing bout with Laertes. The Prince, though addicted to philosophy, was by no means lost in its study; graced in kingly accomplishments and famed for skill with the sword, it was as "a courtier and a soldier" that he was "the expectancy and rose of the fair state." These qualities, and not his love for philosophy, won him popularity with the people. The King, therefore, relying on the Prince's well-known accomplishments, reasonably expected to convince Laertes of Hamlet's jealousy. In feline cunning he begins to work upon the young man's vanity by exaggerating the common rumor of his prowess of arms, which, often repeated in Hamlet's hearing, had stirred his soul to envy. Of

all his accomplishments, Hamlet, he affirms, envied none so much as his skill with the sword, a skill which, though a "mere riband in the cap of youth," is, nevertheless, most becoming to an aspiring youthful knight or courtier. To embolden Laertes, he further inflames his vanity and self-esteem by alleging new reasons for Hamlet's jealousy. With a mixture of truth and fiction he narrates how recently a Norman soldier,²⁰ reputed the flower of knight-errantry, had exhibited before the court at Elsinore a skill in horsemanship so rare, and military feats so wondrous as to surpass imagination. Upon Laertes proudly claiming acquaintance with this foreign knight, who is the acknowledged gem of the French nation, Claudius continued: "Supereminent as he was, he surprised all by affirming that no one in France could match Laertes with the rapier." On hearing all this, Hamlet was so envenomed with envy that he often expressed a desire for Laertes' speedy return that he might measure his swordly skill with him.

As Laertes appeared slower than was supposed to catch at his purpose, the King, as a cunning tactician, suddenly changed the course of procedure. If formerly he labored, according to his interest, to smother the mad flame of Laertes' passion, it is now his interest to bestorm his calm of reason, and to rouse him anew to a fiery thirst for revenge. He begins by cunningly questioning the reality of Laertes' love for his father. Does he truly mourn his loss, or is his a painted sorrow, as of a lily-livered, heartless man? Such an unexpected question startles Laertes; but the King satisfied of his affection for his father, argues that love like all

²⁰ This "gentleman of Normandy named Lamond" is found to have been Duc de Biron, Marshal of France, born about 1563, and executed in the Bastille by order of Henry IV, July 31, 1602. He had been sent by Henry on an embassy to the English Court in 1601. Of his wonderful horsemanship Chapman testifies in his drama, "The Conspiracy of Biron". He was well known to the English, many of whom served under him at Navarre.

transient things has a beginning and an end; that nurtured and matured it dies in that which it feeds upon. What he would do, he should therefore do quickly; in delay there is danger lest, his love growing remiss, his will should in proportion weaken in its "native hue of resolution and lose the name of action." Moreover, the recognition of a duty without the will to perform it, enfeebles our moral nature. Idle is the all too late sigh of the spendthrift for his squandered estate: his sigh of regret is a bitter-sweet which "hurts by easing." Allusion is evidently made to a popular belief of the Poet's day, that every sigh drew blood from the heart, and in consequence shortened life. The King ceases reasoning, and instantly challenges Laertes: Hamlet has returned. Shall you be longer satisfied with empty words? What dare you do to prove yourself the worthy son of Polonius?

"Cut his throat in the Church," was the prompt and impassioned reply of Laertes. His libertinism is manifested in his readiness to invade sacrilegiously the sacred rights of asylum, which approved by laws both civil and religious were maintained by the sanction of severest penalties. The King, however, still more irreligious, finds it to his interest to approve Laertes' mad resolve on the equivocal plea that no sacred asylum should "sanctuarize" murder; and this plea he bases on another false principle that revenge has no restraints. His remarks, uttered while he himself, a criminal, is actually plotting to escape punishment, surprise us by their forceful irony.

His words disclose his hypocrisy: he knew full well that Hamlet did not murder Polonius; he knew full well that the Church did not "sanctuarize" murder; but that in the cause of justice, she opened her sanctuaries for a limited period to a refugee, whether innocent or guilty, when pursued by mob violence or by personal animosity, in order to allow time for

the first heat of resentment to pass away, before the injured party should seek redress.

The right of asylum did not originate with the Church: it existed long before among Jews and pagans. The law of Moses ordained that several cities be designated as places of refuge, whither a man who had killed his neighbor unawares might flee for safety.³⁰ Again in ancient Greece and Rome, the more celebrated pagan temples offered to a real or supposed culprit a sacred refuge against pursuers. When the Church after a conflict of more than three centuries, had triumphed over paganism, and was for the first time recognized as a religious organization distinct from the secular power, her edifices were granted the same privilege, and became asylums still more sacred, not because they were edifices wherein Christians met for prayer, but because each church was a consecrated temple of God in which a Holy Sacrifice was daily offered to the Almighty, and which, moreover, like the historic temple of Jerusalem, was especially sacred as the Holy of Holies, by reason of the ever indwelling presence of God in the Holy Eucharist. An example of the right of sanctuary, already prevalent in the fourth century, has come down to us in the celebrated case of Eutropius. As the minister of the emperor Arcadius, he rendered himself especially odious by many flagrant acts of injustice in the oppression of the people. When suddenly deposed from power, he fled, pursued by a furious mob to the cathedral church. Hearing the tumult, Saint Chrysostom entered the sanctuary. He beheld the fallen minister overcome by fear, clinging to a pillar of the altar, and the church crowded

³⁰ "Therefore I command thee that thou separate three cities at equal distance one from another, that one who is forced to flee for manslaughter, — for killing his neighbor ignorantly, if he be proved to have no hatred against him yesterday and the day before, — may have near at hand whither to escape: he shall flee to one of the cities aforesaid and live, that innocent blood, may not be shed in the midst of the land". Deuteronomy, XIX.

with a maddened throng, which in threatening violence wildly clamored for his death. The saint by a masterful oration in defence of the sacred rights of sanctuary, not only pacified the fierce mob, but also moved it to pity for the abandoned and defenceless culprit.

The right of sanctuary continued a recognized institution throughout Christendom during the middle ages, and, in those troubled times, while the feudal system prevailed, proved most beneficial. If sometimes abused, as all good things are, it was, nevertheless, most frequently a protection to innocent parties when oppressed or pursued by private enmity under the name of law. "Sanctuary" was well known to Shakespeare. Only recently it had been destroyed by Henry VIII. when he seized consecrated churches and monasteries to enrich his favorites—the new upstart nobles of his own creation. Later, when all Catholic Churches were seized by the "Reformers" and devoted to the new religion; when altars were pulled down, and sanctuaries desecrated and despoiled; when the sacrifice of the Mass, and the Real Presence were by law declared idolatrous; "Sanctuary," of course, became at once an anachronism of other and happier times. Its last lingering vestige was abolished under King James. In the church at Beverly and at Hexham, are still pointed out the refuge which had been constructed beside the High Altar, where those fleeing to the peace of the Church were held to be guarded by all its sanctity.

TRIPLE KNAVERY

As soon as Claudius was sure of his willing tool, he exposed his plot in full particulars. But first he insists—that Laertes, "keeping close within his chamber," must deny himself to the Prince; for he fears that a meeting will bring an explanation and a consequent reconciliation which shall nul-

lify his strategy. In the meanwhile, he shall labor so to inflame the jealousy of Hamlet at Laertes' famed skill in fencing as to provoke him to a contest for a royal wager before the public court. Presuming on Hamlet's noble nature, his well-known generosity, and freedom from guile and suspicion, he affirms that Laertes may easily choose without detection, a deadly sword which, with its sharp point unbated or unprotected, will, in a treacherous pass of pretended practice, "requite him for his father." Laertes, however, not to be outdone in the villainous conspiracy, descends to deeper infamy. Disclosing that, already actuated by the thought of poisoning, he had procured a deadly venom, he now proposes by means of it to make assurance doubly sure: he will anoint his sword with a poison so mortal in its nature that nothing can stay its dire effects; no, not even a poultice made from herbs which, gathered in the light of the moon, were popularly supposed to possess an unusual healing charm.

The ready acceptance of the plot by Laertes, and his outdoing of the chief conspirator by the addition of another element of treachery, shows how little need there was for the King to proceed so cautiously in the murderous temptation. Though possessed of a mind far above the average in acuteness, and though a practical man experienced in life, and a good judge of men, Claudius was obliged to take Laertes at his own valuation, and not at his true worth. His failure to read the youth's character aright, was due to want of sufficient knowledge. Never intimate with him as a youth, nor associated with him at court, because of his continued absence in France, Claudius, both before and after the coronation, had little opportunity to discover the real character of the young courtier, and naturally mistook his loud vauntings of honor for true coin. Hence, he felt impelled to proceed with prudence and with caution in unfolding a murderous

plot, which must appear most infamous to a man so apparently enamored of all that is honorable. He had yet to learn that this shallow youth of tinsel and of show was equally shallow in his notions of virtue and of honor; that his whole morality, rooted in the rocky soil of human respect, was a sickly plant, which soon wilted 'neath the burning rays of temptation.

Claudius, though satisfied with the plot, fears its failure on Hamlet's part, or from the disclosure of its purpose by some blunder in its execution. Failure would expose him to even greater danger, and rather than that, it were better not to essay the project. Evidently his confidence in Laertes' superiority with the foils, is not assured; he knows of Hamlet's reputed skill and of his unflagging daily practice, and in consequence feels impelled by fears and doubts to safeguard his heinous design by the addition of a new element of treachery. Likely, it was suggested by Laertes' proposed use of the mountebank's poison. If the plot should fail from Hamlet's foiling by his greater skill the venomed thrust of Laertes, he will have at hand a poisoned chalice from which he will urge Hamlet to slake his thirst when highly heated by the violent action of the contest. Thus is their plot perfected and secured against possible failure; but while gloating in fancy over its assured success, the conspirators are startled as their privacy is broken by the hurried entrance of an unexpected visitor.

The Queen hastens forward with marked emotion and exclaims in impassioned words:

"One woe doth tread upon another's heel,
So fast they follow. Your sister's dead, Laertes."

Dazed at her words, Laertes can utter but one or two exclamations of surprise. The Queen's description, which indi-

cates that the drowning was accidental, is not only picturesque, but also so remarkable in vividness and clearness of detail as to suggest the improbable, that she herself was an eye-witness of Ophelia's death. On the river-bank was a willow which from the looseness of the soil hangs outward aslant the stream, and its green leaves, silvery on the under side, are reflected in the glassy waters. Hither came Ophelia with fantastic garlands of orchis, buttercups, and daisies, and, as she clambered to hang her "coronet weeds" upon the pendent bough, it broke and with her and her flowery trophies fell in the weeping brook. Her clothes spread wide and for a time bore her up, while like a mermaid she chanted snatches of old songs. But soon, her garments water-soaked, the poor maid singing like a dying swan went down to muddy death.

Of the Queen's grief, a critic says: "She was affected after a fashion by the picturesque mode of Ophelia's death, and takes more pleasure in describing it, than any one would who really had a heart. Gertrude was a gossip, and she is gross even in her grief."³¹ The description is poetical rather than dramatic, and gives rise to certain doubts. Is it fictitious or real? Did the Queen or any other person witness the catastrophe? If so, why was no attempt made to rescue the slowly drowning maiden from the little brook? Clearly there was no witness of the sad affair. The description therefore is a fabrication. It is impersonal and studiously embellished with such poetic circumstances as are apt to soften the calamity; hence its accidental nature is emphasized, as

³¹ Of her description, Campbell says: "Its exquisite beauty prevails, and Ophelia dying and dead is still the same Ophelia that first won her love. Perhaps the very forgetfulness of her throughout the remainder of the play, leaves the soul at full liberty to dream of the departed. She has passed away from the earth like a beautiful air—a delightful dream. There would have been no place for her in the agitation and tempest of the final catastrophe. We remember that her heart is at rest, and the remembrance is like the returning voice of melancholy music".

well as the fact that, "incapable" or unconscious "of her own distress," Ophelia, garlanded with flowers and singing, went down to a painless death. The Queen had witnessed the very recent angry outburst of Laertes, knows his hostile feeling against her husband, and fears that the news of his sister's death will stir him to a new and greater passion for revenge. Hence, she deems it more prudent to break the sad news herself, and gradually, and as softly as possible. The scheme was successful; for the description roused Laertes to thoughts and sentiments of grief rather than to anger and resentment.

Laertes moved to tears at the graphic recital of his sister's death, apologizes as a man for a woman's weakness, and departing affirms that his thoughts of fire would blaze forth in burning words, did not his tears of grief extinguish them. "Come, Gertrude, let's follow," says Claudius, "'twas much a-do to calm his rage, and now I fear it will start again. Let us follow."

ACT FIFTH

SCENE FIRST

CHRISTIAN BURIAL

From the death of Ophelia, we naturally pass to the scene of her burial. Without interrupting the action of the drama, her funeral serves as a brief respite for the audience before the breathless on-rush of the fast approaching and final catastrophe. The action is carried on by grave-diggers who by their grim humor and heartless indifference to the nature of their work, form a strong background to a scene wherein, by contact with most opposite extremes, the character of the hero is further luminously revealed. The weird humor of his philosophizing on life, the grave diggers and their gruesome moralizing, the funeral procession and the grapple in the grave, are all contrivances which make the scene a miracle of construction. It exhibits a remarkable change in Hamlet since his return to Denmark. No longer indulging in soliloquies, nor in expressions of weariness of life, nor in self-reproachful analysis of thoughts and feelings, he abandons with one exception the role of dementia, and, with the mists of melancholy slowly dissolving, discloses a new consciousness of power. It may be partly due to success in undermining the plot of Claudius and to the incriminating document in his possession, but more to a feeling which recent events have forced upon him—a feeling that he is in the hands of Providence.

The scene opens with a dialogue between two grave-diggers, who with spades enter a church-yard to make a grave for Ophelia. The conversation of these clowns, the one a

sexton, and the other, a common laborer, is replete with a strange wit that never fails to awaken delight and merriment. Incidentally it reveals the Poet's diversified genius, which enables him to impersonate so naturally even rude and ignorant characters in their peculiar habits and modes of reasoning. The first clown, laughing in untaught wisdom at the learning of philosophers, flashes his ready wit at almost every stroke of the spade; but, beneath it all is discernible a deep and solemn wealth of meaning. Though old, he is yet vigorous and bold of thought, and, in universal sweep of judgment, formulates principles which may or may not justify self-murder. In boastful words he prides himself upon his own avocation and the exalted dignity of his office. The works of other men, whether of stone or iron are all sure to crumble under the ravaging hand of time; but the lowly edifices which he constructs shall, in defiance of the storms of ages, remain intact till the day of general doom. His sane philosophy enables him to perceive the difference between substance and accident, between real and artificial distinctions of social life; for daily he sees exposed before his eyes the fact that all have from Adam the same common patent of nobility.

The dialogue begins with a discussion concerning the justice of according Ophelia Christian burial. Supposing that she had wilfully sought her own fate, or doom, the sexton appeals to the canon of the Church which forbids the burial of deliberate and wilful suicides in consecrated ground. In those days, all Europe was either Jewish, infidel, or Christian; and the term Christian was synonymous with Catholic, for none of the many modern Christian sects had as yet been born. The sexton's opponent appeals in turn to the verdict of the "crowner." The coroner was originally a royal official whose duty was to secure the property of sui-

cides in forfeiture to the crown. His verdict was, as is evident from the text, that Ophelia, like any other Catholic in good standing with the Church, was entitled to Christian burial, either because her death was accidental, or, if wilful and deliberate, was due to her insanity: and one bereft of reason is according to the teaching of the Church, incapable of moral guilt in the violation of the Almighty's "canon against self-slaughter."

The sexton still holding out, resorts to his own peculiar method of reasoning, whereby, as commentators commonly suppose, the Poet intended to parody an inquest held in his day on a certain Sir James Hales. His suicide in a fit of insanity was an admitted fact; but at the inquest arose much quibbling as to the activity or passivity of Sir James in his own death. The Second Clown, impressed by the reasoning of the Sexton, states his positive opinion that, if Ophelia had not been of the aristocracy, she would have been excluded from consecrated ground. This opinion of the clown is not uncommon to Catholics of the ignorant, and unreligious type. Around them, they daily see the influence which wealth and power exercise in the world, and naturally conclude that the same forces invade the sanctuary and sway its ministers. It is a rash judgment born of ignorance or forgetfulness of the fact that the Church has always gloried in being the Church of the poor; that history shows her in unremitting warfare against worldliness in its triple form: "the concupiscence of the flesh, the concupiscence of the eyes, and the pride of life;" that, consistent with her teaching, she reduces to practice her precept of the brotherhood of man and the fatherhood of God. She receives at her sacred altar the serf and the monarch on equal footing, just as they are in the sight of God. In reply to the clown, the sexton ironically deprecates the fact that the world looks with more leniency upon

the drowning or hanging of aristocrats, than of their poorer and "even Christians." The term "even" or fellow Christian contains an allusion to what has been noted above: namely, the professed and actual equality of all Christians in the eyes of the Church.

Another error as palpable as the clown's is found in a recent edition of Hamlet, which we quote merely as a sample of the misleading notes which often "illuminate" our modern school editions of the tragedy. Commenting on the words "out of Christian burial," the author in wondrous simplicity affirms: "The Christianity of Shakespeare's day prescribed that one who ended his own life should be buried without service, at cross roads, and with a stake driven through his heart." How cruel and barbarous! How the young student's mind and heart must be stirred to rebellion against a religion which sanctioned a practice so inhuman and repulsive. But is it fact or fiction? The Christianity of Shakespeare's day comprehended Catholicity, Anglicanism, and Puritanism. Anglicanism was a new state religion established by law of Parliament; Puritanism was another new creed, but non-conformist and in opposition to the state religion. The charge, if made against the Catholic Church, is altogether false. The old religion, in which Shakespeare was born and raised, never ordained that "a suicide be buried at cross roads, nor that a stake be driven through his heart."

The Church has always justly distinguished between culpable and inculpable suicides. To the latter class belong the insane, and to them, as to Ophelia, she accords all her sacred rites, as well as burial in consecrated ground; to the former class belong all who in sane mind wittingly and voluntarily violate God's mandate against self-slaughter. Such, because dying in rebellion against the Creator, she refuses to recognize as of her fold, and, therefore, takes no part in their

burial. If from a popular standpoint there be crimes of darker hue than suicide, there is none other by which from a Catholic standpoint a man so utterly renounces his religion and his God. A common law, which was prevalent throughout Christendom in Shakespeare's time, held that one who encouraged and assisted another to commit suicide was guilty of murder as a principal. Though the willful suicide was denied Christian burial, his friends were free to bury him where and how they pleased, but not with the sacred rites of the Church, nor within her consecrated grounds. These were reserved solely for her true and faithful children.

As Ophelia's corpse is, according to the coroner's inquest, to receive Christian burial, her grave is to be made "straight." The words, "make her grave straight" have been a source of trouble to many commentators, merely from their ignorance of Catholic customs and practices. The words are clear to every Catholic, and they were no less so to Dr. Johnson who, though a Protestant, was known to have been remarkably well acquainted with Catholic doctrines and practices. Ophelia's grave in the church-yard was "to be made straight" that is from east to west, or parallel with the church itself. According to a universal custom dating back to the earliest days of Christianity, Catholics are wont whenever it is possible, to erect their churches facing the Orient, or the Holy Land in honor of the Savior, the Blessed Founder of their religion. In modern Catholic cemeteries, where there is no sacred temple, the Church erects in its stead a great cross which also faces the Orient, and round about it she consigns to their long sleep her faithful children, all turned towards the East, whence in their Christian hope of a glorious resurrection, they await the second coming of the Savior, their God and King.

UNEXPECTED VISITORS

The Sexton having vanquished the Second Clown in a display of wit sends him to a neighboring tavern for a flagon of liquor. "Yaughan" is a Welsh name, and "go get thee to Yaughan's," is probably a clown's gag in allusion to the tavern attached to Shakespeare's Globe Theatre, or refers to some other well-known inn. At the departure of the clown, the sexton while continuing to dig, sings three stanzas of a blundering version of a poem which in correct form is found in Tottel's Miscellany, a work current in the Poet's day. The clown's inaccurate version is intended to be nonsensical, and his interpolated O's and Ah's are expressive of his grunts at striking hard earth with the pickaxe or spade. Thus engaged in his work, the sexton fails to notice the presence of two strangers, who, in their passage through the church-yard, pause to listen to his song.

Hamlet with Horatio is probably on his way to the royal palace for the visit promised in his letter. Though still intent upon obtaining tangible proofs of the crime of Claudius, he has since his one great blunder, come to resign himself altogether to the wiser guidance of Divine Providence. Convinced, moreover, that he shall fall when striking the avenging blow of justice, he frequently thinks of death. What is life to him? He has sacrificed everything, and is even now ready to welcome death in the performance of his sworn task. Mastered by such thoughts, he wanders at ease in mind and heart among the dead, and seems to riot with true pleasure in thoughts and sentiments which are commonly unwelcome to humankind. When alone with the congenial Horatio, whose friendship is so grave and silent, he usually feels at peace, and unconsciously recurs to his native mental disposition. "As he naïvely pours out his thoughts, how little does Horatio answer! He is a continent

on which Hamlet can securely walk, the only domain in Denmark that is not honeycombed with pitfalls."

Though of course ignorant for whom the sexton is fashioning that house of clay, Hamlet expresses to Horatio his resentment at the grave-diggers' insensibility to human feelings. He forgets that long usage has made them familiar with such scenes. Soon a skull is thrown out before him. Its sight engenders in his philosophic mind a train of solemn, but gruesome thoughts, which have been more fully developed by a latter poet:

"Look on its broken arch, its ruined wall,
Its chambers desolate, and portals foul;
Yes, this was once Ambition's airy hall,
The dome of thought, the palace of the soul;
Behold through each lack-lustre, eyeless hole,
The gay recess of Wisdom and of Wit
And passion's host, that never brooked control;
Can all saint, sage, or sophist, ever writ,
People this lonely tower, this tenement refit?"
(Childe Harold, Canto II. VI.)

That skull, Hamlet tells Horatio, which a clown "now overreaches" might have been "the pate of a politician," whose life was spent in overreaching his fellowmen. Shakespeare, no doubt, speaks in irony of the politicians of his day, for whom he had no love, because of their overbearing character and "insolence in office;" in consequence he always uses the term as synonymous with plotter and schemer, a man of craft and artifice who stops at no mean contrivance in the attainment of his dishonorable ends. Such men, he concludes in disgust, "would circumvent God." Was the Poet in clearness of vision prophetic in his words? This tribe of politicians has under modern forms of government, multiplied more than ever in demagogues who, unsatisfied with the things of Caesar, would usurp also the things that are of

God. Hence aiming to destroy the spiritual power that makes for man's higher good, they would exclude the Creator from his own universe, and, ignoring the spiritual element of the citizen, treat him merely as a more or less developed animal, whose whole being they would dominate in soul as well as in body. The thought of such irreligious demagogues or politicians attempting "to circumvent God," prompts Hamlet to exclaim: "Here's a revolution, if we had the trick (skill) to see it." Truly their presumption and impiety, born of self-sufficient pride, are humbled in the dust when we see their offensive "mazzards knocked about with a sexton's spade." Though Hamlet be absorbed in these reflections, he is not oblivious of his one supreme purpose, for the specific allusion to Cain's fratricidal crime discloses that the foul murder of his father by a brother still possesses his mind.

A TRIAL OF WIT

While thus communing with Horatio, Hamlet observes another skull thrown from the grave, and, in a new turn of thought imagining it to be a lawyer's, asks in irony: "why he suffers this rude knave to knock him about the head with a dirty shovel," without entering action for assault and battery. He delights Horatio by his playful satire upon the subtleties and quibbles of the lawyers of his day. Shakespeare's frequent use of law terms and of allusions to legal processes, has led commentators to agree with the opinion of Malone that he was for a time a clerk in the office of a Stratford attorney.³²

³² Quiddities mean subtleties, and is from quidditas, a term common to scholastic philosophy, and signifies the nature or essence of a thing. Quillets stands for quibbels; battery is to beat one unlawfully; recognizances are bonds acknowledging money lent on lands; indentures are duplicate copies of a contract given to two parties. They are called indentures because the perforated parchment, being torn into two pieces, had irregular indented

Hamlet thus far had limited his conversation to Horatio, but from growing interest in the busy sexton and especially from curiosity to know for whom he is making the grave, he decides to speak with him. He, however, in manifest surprise at the wit of the clown, finds him "an absolute knave" with whom he "must speak by the card," or with precision. In fact, his tilt with the sexton is not the least enjoyable of his encounters nor the easiest of his victories. In a battle between a lion and a fly, insignificance is often apt to have the best of it. But in this trial of wit, the Prince's patient courtesy is eventually an overmatch for the sexton's shrewdness and supremely aggravating impudence. The caustic old churl absolutely forgets his caustic disposition beneath the calm unruffled smile of him "that was mad and sent into England." The clown in his tilt with Hamlet, indirectly gives us positive data for settling the mooted question concerning the precise age of the Prince. As we have already¹ fully entered into the subject, we shall merely note in passing that the grave-digger's words are most explicit and clear: assuming the office of sexton "on the very day that Hamlet was born," he had retained it ever since for thirty years. By such explicit and positive proof, the Poet places his hero's age beyond all reasonable questioning.

The clown continues digging and soon throws up another skull at Hamlet's feet. Upon further questioning, the Prince discovers that it is Yorick's and, taking it in his hand, turns to address Horatio. Yorick, the Danish Jörg or George, was, it seems from the text, the king's jester at the court of the

lines, and the genuineness of either part was attested by each fitting exactly with the other. Conveyances were deeds which prove one's legal right to land; assurances meant untainted security for the transfer of lands.

Hamlet puns upon the word "fine" in its fourfold meaning: payment at the close of a lawsuit; a given process in law; elegant or refined; and lastly, small or pulverized.

¹ Vide—Part I, C. VII, p. 51.

elder Hamlet, and had died when the Prince was in his seventh year. The latter remembers well his many gambols with the jester, and his "songs and flashes of merriment;" but now the sight of the skull stirs his imagination to such abhorrence that his "gorge rises at it." He apostrophizes it, exclaiming: "Now get you to my lady's chamber, and tell her, let her paint an inch thick, to this favor she must come." Vanity of vanities and all is vanity. His words do not now refer as formerly to Ophelia in particular but to womankind in general. There were only two women whom Hamlet had really loved. But his idols proving false had shattered his fond dreams, and left him a sceptic concerning all others of their kind. This third reference to the feminine use of cosmetics reveals Shakespeare's strong aversion for the practice. As a close observer of men and affairs, he had many occasions to witness its abuse, and especially in his plays before the court of Elizabeth. He had never seen the Queen in her prime; and when at her expressed wish to witness Falstaff in love, he wrote *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, she was verging on her seventieth year, and bore the sad marks of withering age. But, long accustomed to adulation the most fulsome and extravagant, her appetite for praise grew with her years, and she exacted to the end the same homage to her faded charms as had been paid to her youth. Hence all were careful to express their admiration of her beauty in language of oriental hyperbole. When she appeared in public, as at Shakespeare's plays at court, she attired herself most magnificently "on the supposition that, being dazzled by the glittering aspect of her outward ornaments, spectators would not so easily discern the marks of age and decay of nature and beauty."³³ On these occasions, "she was painted not only all over her face, but her very neck and

³³ Ellis 2nd, ser. iii, 191, apud Lingard's "History of England", Vol. VI, p. 657.

breast also.”³⁴ This practice of the Queen was of course followed from courtesy, if for no other reason, by her many female attendants; and the custom once established at court grew apace in the outer world. Hence Shakespeare was true to facts, when Hamlet, who represents his thoughts and sentiments more than any other character, railed at the dames of fashion in the words: “God has given you one face, and you make yourselves another.”

Passing from “my lady” to philosophize upon the vanity of human life, and power, and glory, Hamlet reflects that even an Alexander or an “imperious Caesar” must, like all mortals, come to this humiliating corruption of the grave:

“The boast of heraldry, the pomp of power,
And all that beauty, all that wealth e’er gave,
Awaits alike the inevitable hour:—
The paths of glory lead but to the grave.”

The base use to which may be put all that remains to us of the greatest worldly heroes, appears to Hamlet’s mind to emphasize in the concrete the truths of Divine Revelation, which are too often recognized only in the abstract. The grave covers the mighty and the proud with supreme humiliation. Man from the first revolted against his Creator, and many since, mentally intoxicated by the fumes of power, or honor, or affluence, or learning, or liberty and independence, have said in pride-inflated folly, “there is no God!” — “man is God!” But stern truth was soon forced upon them by the Angel of Death, whose avenging arm nothing can stay: neither power, nor fortune, nor genius, nor love, nor sorrow, nor happiness, nor despair. Recognizing no distinction of persons, Death is stirred by no sentiment, influenced by no interest, moved by no pitying supplication, and barred by no earthly force. Death puts in their place

³⁴ Ms. letter January 13, 1602, apud Lingard, *ibidem*.

the men of science who, vainly glorying in their knowledge of the universe, foolishly ignore its Creator; the men of exalted station who, in the sottishness of power, abuse it against their fellowmen; all, Death crushes, and humbles in the dust, and makes them feel that they are only creatures of fragility, corruption, and worthlessness, and that the Creator alone is Lord and Master of the universe: thus Death is destined to restore the moral order when disturbed by moral evil.

OPHELIA'S FUNERAL

Hamlet is roused from his moralizing by the near approach of a procession, in which he sees the King and Queen with attendants following a corpse. He withdraws some distance from the grave to watch the proceedings. Filled with surprise, he is curious to discover "who is this they follow?" Horatio fails to answer; he knows that Hamlet, just returned to Elsinore, is ignorant of Ophelia's death, and fears that his intense love for her may rouse a slumbering passion that would bring him into conflict with Laertes. At the silence of Horatio, Hamlet conjectures that "the maimed rites" indicate the corpse of a Suicide. The word "maimed" seems an interpolation which was made by some one who was less acquainted with Catholic rites than Shakespeare, for, as will be shown, the funeral rites of Ophelia were in no manner "maimed." It was most likely introduced here to excuse and even to give some verisimilitude to a greater corruption of the text which was to be made later in the abusive words, assigned to Laertes against the officiating priest.

In the following text, Laertes, always so fond of show, senselessly creates a scene by shamefully attempting to browbeat an innocent and unoffending priest. If, like a veritable *Bombastes Furioso*, he stirs to applause all who are prejud-

iced against the Church and her ministers, he moves, on the other hand, the more wise and judicious to frown in disapproval upon his unjust and uncalled-for conduct. The two opposite classes of spectators are well exemplified in two critics, the one English, and the other American. The latter writes:

“This choleric stripling, whose heart was in Paris; who cowers before a ‘king of shreds and patches,’ yet bullies an irresponsible and discretionless priest; who had even more than the full fraternal indifference to his sister until she lost her reason and her life; this small Hector must now make a scene over her dead body. And such a scene! His plunge into the open grave is unworthy of the mountebank from whom he bought the mortal unction: his invocation enough to madden any onlooker. All that palpable rant, all that sham despair, all that base mortal thunder, in the holy grave of the unpolluted girl!” (*A Review of Hamlet*: George H. Miles.)

Far different writes the English critic. His commentary shows him to be animated by a blind prejudice that impels him to mar his pages by aspersions which are in contradiction to the doctrines and practices of the Church. He says:

“To Ophelia’s funeral the Church reluctantly sends her representatives. All that the occasion suggests of harsh, formal, and essentially inhuman dogmatics is uttered by the priest. The distracted girl has by untimely accident met her death; and, therefore, instead of charitable prayers, ‘shards, flints, and pebbles should be thrown on her.’ These are the words of truth, of peace, of consolation, which religion has to whisper to wounded hearts.” (Dowden’s *Shakespeare, his Mind and Art*, page 136.)

These sentiments regarding the Church and her ministers are too often shared by readers and auditors of the play, either from prejudice, or from a want of careful study of the text, or from ignorance of the Church’s doctrines and practices, which they are satisfied to learn from wholly unreliable

mediums, as the theatres, rather than from credible and orthodox sources. While reserving the above aspersions of the critic for a later refutation, we notice for the present that each of his five assertions is based on an error either expressed or implied. This shall be clearly manifest, if our modern composite text be examined in its relation to Catholic rites and ceremonies:

Laertes. What ceremony else?

First Priest. Her obsequies have been as far enlarged
 As we have warranty; her death was doubtful;
 And, but that great command o'ersways the order
 She should in ground unsanctified have lodged
 Till the last trumpet; for charitable prayers,
 Shards, flints and pebbles should be thrown on her.
 Yet here she is allowed her virgin crants,
 Her maiden strewments and the bringing home
 of bell and burial.

Laertes. Must there no more be done?

First Priest. No more be done.
 We should profane the service of the dead
 To sing a requiem and such rest to her
 As to peace-parted¹ souls.

Laertes. Lay her i'the earth;
 And from her fair and unpolluted flesh
 May violets spring. I tell thee, churlish priest,
 A ministering angel shall my sister be,
 When thou liest howling.

This citation with its manifest interpolation contains three assertions which to every Catholic are evidently erroneous. The first is that doubtful suicides are denied Christian burial, the second that the priest at the King's command violated the laws of the Church, and thirdly, that the chant of a *requiem* for the repose of the soul of a doubtful suicide is a profanation of holy rites. In refutation, it is only necessary to consider the ordinations of the Church concerning the burial of suicides as well as her unwavering practice.

¹ Peace-departed, an expression common to Catholics which signifies that the dying person departed in peace with God, fortified in faith and hope in His mercy, by means of the last sacraments of the Church: sacramental confession, the Holy Eucharist, the Extreme Unction. Of his privation of these sacraments, the ghost of Hamlet's father had bitterly complained.

THE CATHOLIC RITUAL SERVICE

The Church reserves exclusively her consecrated cemeteries for the interment of her own accredited members who die, as far as may be known, in the friendship and grace of God. All others are excluded; over them she claims no jurisdiction, nor legislates for them, nor has aught to do with their burial. Concerned only with her own children, she reasonably distinguishes between culpable and inculpable suicide. If one of sound mind deliberately commits self-murder, he knows that thereby he wilfully places himself beyond her pale, and renounces his right to Christian burial; such suicides never occur among her faithful children. But if one takes his own life, while bereft of reason, she considers him inculpable; and just as the civil and criminal courts do not inflict punishment upon one that violates the law, if he be proven insane, so neither does the Church decree spiritual penalties against a suicide whose dementia made him incapable of a rational act in the material violation of the moral law of God. Accordingly, barring such an unfortunate from none of her sacred rites, she buries him with all the honors of a faithful child.

If such be the action of the Church in relation to culpable and inculpable suicides, what is her conduct towards a self-destroyer whose moral culpability is in doubt? The question involves a twofold possibility: either the perfect sanity of the man is admitted and the doubt exists only concerning the manner of his death, whether accidental or self-inflicted; or again, self-slaughter may be an evident fact, but a positive doubt may exist regarding the sanity or insanity of the man. In either case, the Church first seeks to remove the doubt, and if this be impossible, and if the individual was a faithful communicant, she in charity suspends her judgment, and as a loving mother gives her child the benefit of the

doubt, and accords him full Christian burial. With this common and unvarying practice of the Church in mind, no one can fail to notice the several errors of our modern composite text in regard to the burial service of Ophelia.

The text moreover contains a marked discrepancy. In the previous Act, the Queen had testified that Ophelia's drowning was accidental, in the present Act, the sexton asserts it to have been wilful, and, in consequence, questions her right to Christian burial. His view may be safely assumed to have been the common opinion outside the court. He is, however, assured by the assistant grave-digger on the strength of the coroner's verdict, or warrant; and what this warrant was we learn later from the priest officiating at the funeral, when he says: "We have warranty: her death was doubtful." That is, the coroner and his jury could not agree whether Ophelia wilfully drowned herself or not, and, therefore, rendered a verdict which left the question in doubt; and acting on this doubt, the Church accorded Ophelia Christian burial. Here then, in the words of the grave-diggers, and of the coroner's jury, and of the priest, we have sufficient evidence that none of them was aware of Ophelia's insanity. Were it otherwise, the manner of her death would have been merely an incidental matter; for her dementia, if known to these three parties concerned, would at once have established her positive and undoubted right to Christian burial. Her insanity, like her father's death and hasty burial, was, it would seem, kept a secret within the royal court, and carefully guarded from the general public; hence the sexton, coroner, and priest being ignorant thereof, each based his action, not on Ophelia's insanity which would have given her a greater and positive right to Christian burial, but on the less and incidental question of the doubtful manner of her death.

Ophelia was, however, according to the text, buried in

consecrated ground, and, in consequence, not with "maimed rites." Interment in consecrated ground is the essential point in Christian burial, and, where that is granted, all accidental rites and ceremonies are also accorded without restriction. Hence the text leads non-Catholics into error, if they be unacquainted with the funeral service of the Church. They do not know that the corpse which, in the case of a young maiden, is robed in white, and crowned with flowers in token of her innocence, is first borne to the House of God, and placed before His sacred altar, where the mourners join in spirit with the priest who, attired in the sacred vestments of his office, begins a *Requiem* for the repose of the "peace-departed soul." This Holy Sacrifice is commonly called a "Requiem," because of the first word of the liturgical prayer of the Mass.³⁵ They do not know that after the "Requiem" the priest standing before the corpse, gives the last solemn absolution and blessing of the Church, and, as is often customary, addresses the mourners in such words of consolation as only the true Christian religion can inspire, words of divine faith and hope based on the assurance of God Himself: "I am the resurrection and the Life, he that believeth in me shall not see death forever."

The corpse is next borne to the cemetery or sleeping ground of the Christians, which has been specially consecrated by the Church. If the funeral be that of some functionary of State or of the royal household, the priest with his attendants accompanies the cortege to the cemetery, and, standing at the open grave, solemnly blesses the corpse, and pronounces over it the last prayers of Holy Church. This prayer concludes the funeral services, and all the mourners depart in the silence of deep sorrow. It was at this moment that Laertes ruthlessly interrupted the solemn scene, and rudely shocked

³⁵ "Requiem aeternam dona eis Domine: et lux perpetua luceat eis". Ps. 64. Roman Missal.

the retiring mourners. In ignorance of the Church's ritual, he accosted the priest in unbecoming tones, and demanded further impossible ceremonies—impossible—because none further are prescribed by the Church. He should have known that her ministers are not allowed to improvise new rites and ceremonies.

Such is the funeral service of the Church, and such was Ophelia's, notwithstanding the errors of the text. In brief, Ophelia's "doubtful death" entitled her to Christian burial, and such, in the words of the Poet, she received when interred in "sanctified grounds." Her *quasi*-royal funeral, unmarred by "maimed rites," was adorned with all the solemn ceremonies which accompany interment in consecrated ground.

A CAPTIOUS CRITIC

These facts and principles considered, a mere statement of Dowden's calumnies will suffice to show that, though they may be true when applied to some church of the critic's own creation or imagination, they are altogether false when directed against the real Catholic Church. Pass we now to his charges *seriatim*. He writes:

"To Ophelia's funeral the Church reluctantly sends her representatives."

This is not true; the Church does not send her ministers reluctantly to funerals such as Ophelia's; but, on the contrary, they attend by virtue of their office, and perform the funeral service as prescribed in her ritual; and, therefore, the text is in error, when it says that the priests performed the service at the King's command. A royal mandate was unnecessary, and, if given, was superfluous; for, according to the words of the priest, Ophelia's "death was doubtful," and in such a case, as already shown, Christian burial is accorded. If

the maiden had not been entitled to the funeral rites of the Church, no king's command could have conferred the right, and it would have been disregarded, because an unwarranted intrusion. The Church is not an annex of the State, but a spiritual Kingdom, free, independent, and supreme within her own religious domain; and, therefore, while inculcating obedience to the temporal sovereign in all things mundane, she does not admit his supremacy in affairs religious or spiritual. Her action is guided by the divine axiom, which affects both Church and State alike, "Give to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." The second charge is:

"All that the occasion suggests of harsh, formal, and essentially inhuman dogmatics, is uttered by the priest."

There is no question of "dogmatics" at Ophelia's funeral, but merely of rites and ceremonies which are subject to legislation of the Church. Whatever harshness there is, arises from the rudeness and ignorance of Laertes, which prompts him to overstep the "bounds of modesty" and decorum. The words of the priest, who after all is human, are perhaps excusable, because of the resentment which an ignorant, blustering, and irreligious stripling aroused in him by his impudence and insistent impossible demands.

"The distracted girl has by untimely accident met her death."

Here, the critic, pronouncing his *ipse dixit* in contradiction to the Poet, holds Ophelia's death to have been accidental, notwithstanding the fact that the sexton, coroner, and priest, all to the contrary, affirm it to have been doubtful. But it matters little; in either case, the Church grants full Christian burial. A critic, however, if he would be rational and just, should judge according to the knowledge and circumstances

which dominate the agent, rather than by some imaginary assumption of his own.

“Instead of charitable prayers, ‘Shards, flints, and pebbles should be thrown on her’.”

This sentence contains an implied error; namely, that the priest, instead of offering charitable prayers, threw ‘shard, flints, etc,’ upon Ophelia’s grave. The text expressly states that he did not do so; but, to the contrary, gave her “charitable prayers”; and they are copious in the Church’s dirge and Requiem for the dead. True, the priest affirms, when impudently taunted by the stripling, that, though “shards, flints, etc.” are thrown upon the graves of wilful suicides, yet, because Ophelia’s death was doubtful, the Church instead accorded her Christian funeral rites: a *Requiem*, a tolling of her bells, and attendance of her ministers, as her corpse with “virgin crants,” or garlands borne before it, is carried in procession “amid strewment of flowers,” to her last long home for religious burial. The fact is, considering Laertes’ ignorance of religion and his indifference to its precepts, as exemplified in his known libertinism, he should have been, among the many mourners, the very last to mar the solemn scene by a foolish exhibition of himself in senseless and impossible demands. The critic lastly remarks:

“These are the sacred words of truth, of peace, of consolation which religion has to whisper to wounded hearts.”

These words prove beyond doubt that the critic never witnessed the Church’s ritual for the dead. All who have, both Christian and infidel, have been surprised and deeply moved by its impressiveness. In bland-like innocence, he mistakes for a part of the ritual, the well-merited rebuke which the priest administered to the irreligious and obtrusive youth. We wonder what are “the sacred words of truth, of peace,

of consolation" which unbelief, agnostic or infidel, "whispers to wounded hearts." The grave, they affirm, obliterates man; and, therefore, their "whispered words of consolation" can be naught but a chilling message of appalling gloom and never-ending despair. Not so, however, with the Christian; he knows by the light of Divine Faith that the present life is but the vestibule to a brighter world; that death is but the portal through which the Christian, on abandoning his domicile of clay, is ushered into his real home of eternal bliss. The Church, because divinely commissioned, can with authoritative voice speak the inspiring and consoling truths of "the Light of the world." Standing amid the mourners beside the open grave, she can arrest their tears by God's powerful promise: "O death, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting?"¹ she as none other soothes wounded hearts when, in "words of truth, of peace, of consolation," she proclaims with God-given assurance, that "death is swallowed up in victory"; that her children "shall not see death forever"; that they but sleep the sleep of the just until the grand awakening to bliss and glory in a joyful resurrection at the second coming of their king.

A DIFFICULTY

From Dowden turn we to a more important topic. The errors of judgment which our *modern composite text* ascribes to the priest appear very grave when we consider that he is supposedly well-acquainted with his official duties, as well as with the Catholic ritual for funeral service. These errors must of course be ultimately charged to Shakespeare. But how shall they be accounted for? There are but two alternatives: either the text is corrupt or the Poet is in error. If the latter be assumed, a difficulty of no small moment stares us in the face. If Shakespeare, as is well-known, was familiar

¹ I. Cor. 15.

with Catholic tenets and practices in minute details; if often touching in his numerous dramas on the Church's doctrines, sacraments, and ceremonies, he is remarkably free from the many blunders which blemish the plays of contemporary dramatists; and, if, even on the subject of "evening Mass," which to modern Catholics must seem incredible, he is also correct, because in harmony with the prevailing custom in Verona, shall we say that he commits an error in a matter as simple as Ophelia's funeral?

Such a supposition is scarcely admissible; and from it we turn to the other alternative, the corruption of the text. It is here important to recall what we have shown,¹ that no certainty exists regarding the genuineness and integrity of our modern reading, since it differs much from previously existing manuscripts and prints. It is, however, certain that the original edition of the Tragedy of Hamlet, published in 1603, gives the play as it was enacted by Shakespeare and his company in the Provinces and in the universities of Oxford and Cambridge in 1601, and in London in 1602-3. In it the text runs as follows:

Laertes. What ceremony else? say, what ceremony else?

Priest. My lord, we have done all that lies in us,
And more than well the Church can tolerate,
She hath had a *dirge sung* for her maiden soul;
And but for favor of the king and you,
She had been buried in the open fields,
Where now she is allowed Christian burial.

It will at once be noticed that these six lines of the original text have grown into thirteen in our modern version, that it makes no reference to a "warranty" or verdict of doubtful suicide by a coroner's jury, that they contain neither the second speech of the priest nor the three grave errors and contradictions of our composite text. It merely

¹ Vide p. 297.

asserts that the priest had by kindly toleration sung a "*requiem*" for Ophelia's maiden soul, and granted her Christian burial. All this is in strict accordance with the law and practice of the Church. The priest from want of evidence and from ignorance of Ophelia's actual insanity, as already shown, was unable to form for himself a fixed judgment regarding her moral responsibility. Hence, accepting the common opinion of the court, he could favor the King and the bereaved family by granting Christian burial, as the Church in charity allows in such circumstances.

Thus we see that the original text of Shakespeare, though in full accord with Catholic law and practice, becomes later by an interpolation full of errors. In fact, the words which our modern composite text assigns to the priest, are in clear contradiction to his official action at Ophelia's grave. The interpolator was probably an actor, who alone, as was customary, possessed the acting manuscript of his part, and, who, unlike Shakespeare, was in absolute ignorance of the common ritual of the Church. The addition was likely prompted by a desire to make room for Laertes' abuse of the priest. Such abusive words were welcomed and highly applauded at that time when open and persistent persecution was waged against the olden Church, and when dramatists, except Shakespeare, were accustomed to pander to the popular prejudices of their audiences. In short: either our modern composite text, which is far from perfect, is here corrupt, or Shakespeare, who in all his works proves himself most familiar with things Catholic, must be supposed to have blundered here for the first and only time in the most simple and obvious practice of the Church. Such a supposition Shakespearean critics will be slow to entertain.

A BOISTEROUS SCENE

The Queen disregarding Laertes' evil words and desirous of interrupting his unbecoming outbreak, advances with at-

tendants to the edge of the open grave. She had really loved Ophelia and sincerely mourned the untimely loss of the maiden whom she had come to look upon as the future spouse of her only and darling child. Strewing flowers upon the confined clay, her eyes glistening the while with welling tears, she utters in grief-broken voice her last words of parting, words, which, sincere as her sorrow, are beautiful and affecting: "Sweets to the sweet; farewell! I thought to have decked thy bridal-couch, sweet maid, and not to have strewed thy grave." The present portrayal of the sensible grief and true affection of Gertrude, who in other relations exhibits a nature unrefined and callous to sentiment, reveals the Poet's masterful knowledge of character and keen insight into the mixed motives of human passions.

The solemn and affecting scene, instead of allaying the excitement of Laertes, only stirs him to a more violent outburst. Strong men, when overcome by grief, give it little external expression; and the more manly the man and the deeper his grief, the more it preys inwardly upon his mind and heart, and so acutely as to stifle all external womanly manifestation. But the grief of the shallow Laertes seems not to have been of this nature. The memory of his long neglect of his sister, of his abandoning her to the lonely and dull prosaic life with her aged father, while he selfishly pursued a gay life in a distant metropolis, was no doubt an impelling motive for his loud expression of sorrow. When death steals away a beloved friend, the survivor feels awakened in his heart a deeper affection than was experienced before, and with it comes a keen sorrow and regret that he had not been kindlier and more loving. These thoughts and sentiments exercised a strong influence upon Laertes, and urged him to atone for his indifference to his sister's company by an unmanly show of grief which found expression in turgid words and boisterous exaggeration.

No sooner had he heard the Queen's utterance of the name of Hamlet, than he starts in phrenzy to call down curses on him for his wicked deed—a deed which he knows was not wicked, because not culpable, but accidental. With loud words, driving back the sexton, who had begun to fill up the grave, he leaps therein, and continues his rant before the astonished gathering.

Still ignorant of her dementia and accidental death, Hamlet was unaware that the funeral was Ophelia's. He had stood apart from the throng, and was with Horatio merely an idle but interested spectator. When, however, he heard Laertes utter the word, sister, in the abuse of the priest, he exclaimed: "What, the fair Ophelia!" Hurriedly he pressed forward to hear the evil imprecations of the youth, and breaking through the crowd of mourners, stood beside the open grave. Laertes still continued in boisterous words his tragic show of grief. His ranting violence of words and action, Hamlet felt was little less than empty noise—a rude mockery—and a desecration of solemn religious rites. It sufficed to conjure up the memory of his own true love, and of the wrongs which that ranting brother had done Ophelia and himself: he had calumniated him and his honest love; he had blighted her young heart; he had neglected her until she was beyond his care when, returning at his father's death, he found her hopelessly insane. Strongly agitated by impassioned feelings of love, grief, and anger, Hamlet, still standing at the margin of the grave, and glancing now at the casket and now at Laertes, questions in earnest tones of keen irony the reality of his unseemly and overdone show of mourning: "What is he whose grief bears such an emphasis, whose phrase of sorrow conjures the wandering stars and makes them stand in listening wonder?" Then, before the royal court and the crowding mourners, he exclaims to Laertes, "this is I, Ham-

let the Dane!" the well-known lover of the dead maiden, a lover whose affection exceeds a brother's by all measure. With this he leaps into Ophelia's grave, there to brave the exaggerated grief of her brother.

Surprised at the Prince's sudden action and angered at his taunting words, Laertes grapples with him, and curses him,—curses are frequent on his lips. Though thus openly cursed and grasped by the throat, Hamlet, nevertheless, preserves in the tussle a determined calm, and only seeks to shake off his assailant. With wondrous self-control and in cool expostulation, he warns Laertes not to rouse him to anger, lest he crush him by his conscious power. This sudden and strange encounter over the corpse of Ophelia, throws the court and mourners into great commotion. The King in excited words commands attendants to pluck the combatants asunder; the Queen in stress of grief loudly calls upon her son; and even the staid Horatio urgently pleads with his friend.

A CHALLENGE

The sudden realization of Ophelia's death, awakened in Hamlet that love which he thought he had sacrificed to his sacred duty of "revenge". At its awakening, gone was his philosophic calm; gone was his firm resolve to maintain self-restraint: anger, which was measured by his love, had shrivelled up all scruples; had broken down the ramparts of respect and prudence; had called forth the first cry of his love that ever reached the ears of others. Else it would have lain buried with Ophelia in the silence of her lover's breast. In an overpowering sense of that reawakened passion, he braves debate. He will fight with Laertes upon the theme of love, until his eyelids will no longer wag. His mind and heart aglow, he proclaims a brother's puny love to be naught, when

compared with the magnitude of his own. Its intensity overtops that of "forty thousand brothers."

Claudius, observing Laertes' anger and abashment, seeks to soothe his ruffled feelings by exclaiming: "O, heed him not; for his madness quite undoes him." The mother also pleads with him, for the love of God, to forbear her son in his afflicted state. But Hamlet, heedless of their words, continues in scornful contempt to denounce Laertes' rant. He challenges him by the Savior's sacred wounds to come to action instead of words. In homely phrases full of derision, he dares him to deeds most extraordinary and repulsive in proof of his love. His words glow with the fire of passion, which alike quickens his imagination, and in withering terms he addresses him: "Show me what thou wilt do; wouldst thou weep, fight, fast, and tear thyself? Wouldst thou drink up eisel?³⁵ eat a crocodile? I will do it. Dost thou come here to whine? to outface me with leaping in her grave? Be buried alive with her, and so will I."

On this passage, Miles comments beautifully as follows:

"What can be juster, what can be grander! Mortal love and manly scorn were never strung before or since to such sublime intensity. The foot of true love lies on the prostrate sham love, like the foot of Michael on Lucifer; though here the angelic brow is flushed and ruffled with the rage of combat. Over the dead maiden stands the doomed lover, proclaiming his full faith before assembled Denmark in tones whose echoes, ringing down the aisles of death, must

³⁵ The word Eisel has been a bone of contention among annotators. Some think it probably the river Yssel which is a northern branch of the Rhine, and nearest to Denmark; others hold with Theobald that "Eisel" means vinegar. The evidence in favor of this interpretation lies in the sense of the text, which manifestly suggests some pungent and disagreeable drink, corresponding to the repulsive flesh of a crocodile. Eisel in this signification appears in the one hundred and eleventh sonnet of the poet:

"Whilst like a willing patient, I will drink
Potions of 'eisel', 'gainst my strong infection;
No bitterness that I will bitter think,
No double penance to correct correction'".

Again, the word is found in a prayer of the "Salisbury Primer" of 1555, as follows: "O blessed Jesu . . . I beseech Thee for the bitterness of the 'aisell' and gall that thou tasted, etc."

have conveyed to her ransomed soul and reillumined mind the dearest tribute of mortality to perfect the chalice of spiritual bliss. That sweet face on the threshold of another sphere, must have turned earthward awhile to catch those noble, jealous words." (*A Review of Hamlet.*)

Before the vehemence of that grand passion, Laertes wilts. Before the assembled mourners, he stands in pitiable silence, exposed, abashed, and discomfited. His is the helplessness of the wren beneath the rapacious swoop of the eagle. His rebuke was merited, and his discomfiture is an illustration of the supremacy which a nature, ennobled by intellectual and moral worth, may wield over a man, made ignoble by a life of pleasure and frivolities.

"This is mere madness," exclaims the Queen. Her son's passionate vehemence of word and action had prompted her, in maternal solicitude, to come to his defence. True to her promise to maintain his simulated madness, she urges it in excuse of his wild conduct. As Lady Macbeth, to reassure the peers, had said:

"Sit, worthy friends; my lord is often thus,
The fit is momentary; upon a thought
He will again be well;"

so the Queen affirms: "Awhile the fit will work on him; but soon he will brood in silence, as the patient dove over her golden downy couplets."

His mother's words recall Hamlet to himself. In calmness of tone but in words of reproach, he remonstrates with Laertes. He had loved him ever, and, therefore, cannot comprehend the cause of his anger, curses, and attempted violence. It does not occur to him that Laertes sees in him the slayer of his father and the cause of his sister's dementia. Of the latter, he is still ignorant; and of the former, he feels in conscience guiltless. Philosophizing, however, on the cause, his words are prophetic as regards the conspirators.

Men are what they are, and will act accordingly: as the cat mews by nature, and the dog bays, so a man, by nature choleric, splenetic, and impulsive, will rush rashly into actions which "cannot but make the judicious grieve."

On Hamlet's sudden departure, Claudius, in fear of further trouble, earnestly entreats Horatio to follow and wait upon him. Then turning to the Queen, he pleads that she look to her son, and set some watch upon him. He next addresses Laertes. Reading upon the face of the crestfallen and sullen youth how terribly his vanity had been lacerated, he comforts him, and urges him to strengthen his patience by the thought of the conspiracy which shall be carried out at once. In words enigmatic to the Queen, he assures him that the living Hamlet shall by his death be a monument to his sister's grave. The scene concludes as the King, at the thought of Hamlet's speedy death, shares his hopes with Laertes that

"An hour of quiet shortly shall we see;
Till then, in patience our proceedings be."

SCENE SECOND

A PRIVATE CONFERENCE

Hamlet, having hurried away from the scene of the late disturbance, was overtaken by Horatio. Both made their way to the royal castle where they held a secret conference. There were several important incidents that had happened during the Prince's absence, such as the dementia and death of Ophelia, and these, because already well-known to the audience needed no exposition. But to Hamlet they were new and of supreme interest; hence Horatio gives him the full particulars as he had gathered them. The narration finished, the curtain rises as Hamlet exclaims: "So much for this sir; now shall you see the other," that is, he will now give a circumstantial account of his own adventures in the interim, as he had promised in the letter: "Repair thou to me with as much speed as thou wouldst fly death. I have words to speak in thine ear that will make thee dumb."

He begins the story with events of his second night at sea. After setting sail from Elsinore at nightfall, he had neither during that night nor on the following day, caught sight of the pretended pirate ship, which according to his plot, was to pursue, overtake, grapple with the royal vessel, capture him, and restore him again safely to Denmark. As it had not overtaken them in the more narrow waters of the Baltic, it was less likely to do so now that the royal ship was swiftly coursing in the broad expansive waters of the North Sea. Hence, fears and doubts perplexed his anxious mind. Perhaps, after all, his "deep plot had palled;" perhaps, the pirate ship in the darkness of the night was unable to follow in their track and had swerved from its course; perhaps, it was stayed in

port, because some minion of the King had betrayed the plot. Whatever the cause of failure, he perceived his great peril. He knew that the main and secret purpose of the specious embassy, was to rid Denmark of his presence. Now, helpless on the open sea in the power of royal officers, the willing tools of an unscrupulous and villanous king, he felt increasing fears that the secret letters meant his perpetual imprisonment in England, if not his immediate execution; in either case, as surely as he set foot on English soil, his sacred cause would be lost forever. Often through the day had he with anxious eye scanned the horizon to catch a glimpse of the longed-for pirate ship, but with the passing of the second night his last ray of hope was swiftly vanishing. Was the "smiling villain" to outwit him? Was the bloody usurper to dye his soul still deeper by the perpetration of another secret murder? Were all the sacrifices he himself had made for the purpose of his sworn "revenge," only to prove him in fine a miserable ingrate, recreant to duty and to the memory of a loved and honored father? Such thoughts racked his being to its very depths, as restless upon the couch he lay: "in his heart there was a kind of fighting that would not let him sleep." Fears and doubts, as well as an actual sense of imminent peril, roused his brain to feverish activity. In wild imagination he lay a helpless prisoner, like a mutinous sailor, his limbs shackled with Bilboan fetters. Within him, his soul cried aloud for action; but his sense of inability of exertion, his sense of utter helplessness, tortured him with an overpowering pain, which drove him to despair, and despair "rashly" drove him to an "indiscreet" performance.

How Hamlet stole the secret packet, he graphically tells Horatio, and in the narration reveals the refinement of his moral nature; though the letters were a treacherous design upon his life, and their seizure warranted by right of self-

defence, he, nevertheless, pleads in excuse the fact that the breaking of the royal seals was not a human act, since prompted, not by reason, but by over-mastering fear. He further informs Horatio of the royal knavery disclosed in the usurper's command for his immediate execution, and also the peculiar reasons by which Claudius hoped to induce the English monarch to comply with the "exact command" of the sealed death-warrant. It required that without the least delay Hamlet's "head should be struck off." One cause alleged was that the good of England, as well as of Denmark demanded the death of the Prince; other reasons were a medley of "bugs and goblins," that is, bugbears or fantastic dangers and gross distortions of the actual facts of his life. There can be little doubt that a fratricide, so vilely criminal as Claudius, resorted to false charges, in order to win the English king to his cause, especially when he deemed the crown, as well as his own life endangered by the continued existence of the Prince. To Horatio, surprised and apparently incredulous, Hamlet hands the telltale document for leisurely perusal in proof of his words. He had been earnestly seeking tangible evidence of the villain's guilt, and here at last was one which would help him to justify before the citizens of Denmark, his impending stroke of "revenge."

He next proceeds to narrate how, when "be-netted round with villainies," he, in self-defence, and not from malignity, devised his supplementary plot; how in jubilant confidence of his ready wit, he penned that secret conjuration to the English king. His action, he asserts, was under stress of circumstances, sudden and without thought or reflection. Before he could consider what was to be done, his mind, completely aroused by impending perils, had in fiery activity shot forth flaming thoughts, which formed instantly a scheme of action; and these winged burning thoughts "had begun the

play," before he could devise even an introduction. The scheme, therefore, came impromptu; it was an inspiration which like a sudden ray of light banished perplexing darkness. It was so rich in ingenuity, that, completely fascinating him, it impelled him, under a strong impulse of imagination rather than of will, to write out the substituted commission. It was an easy matter, because of his skill in penmanship, a skill which he had "labored much" to forget; since he had come to think with statesmen of the day, that "to write fair" was a baseness in them, though an accomplishment in their underlings. His skill, however, now served him well in enabling him to counterfeit the hand of Claudius. As he found the royal document assigned many reasons for his execution, so he prefaced the new mandate with many a whereas, such as might induce the tributary king to execute the spies without delay.

Hamlet recognized his subsidiary plot as a divine inspiration. He saw Heaven's ordination in the fact that he had on his person his father's signet ring, the very one after which that of Claudius had been fashioned. With the royal seal affixed to the spurious document, nothing more was wanting for the completion of the scheme, and he calmly awaited results. On the next day, after all hope had been abandoned, the pretended pirates overtook them and grappled with the ship. As soon as he had leaped in their midst, they instantly cut away, as prearranged, and, leaving the royal vessel to continue on its course to England, hastened back and landed him safely in Denmark.

DIVINE PROVIDENCE

After mature reflection upon these incidents, Hamlet comes to see more than ever the interposition of Divine Providence in the affairs of men. In self-reliance, he had boasted

that he would “delve one yard beneath their mines, and blow them to the moon;” in self-reliance, he had gone forth with the enemy upon the cruise to England, confident of rescue by the counter stratagem of a pirate ship; but when his “deep plot” apparently had failed, and left him helpless, like a fettered prisoner in the throes of despair, the scheme which flashed upon his mind, without thought or effort of his own, he now recognized as a Divine inspiration. It brought him what he had so long and eagerly desired, — a positive and tangible proof of the murderer’s guilt. His death-warrant, written by the hand of the King, and bearing the royal seal, was beyond dispute a convincing proof. The precious document he entrusts for safe-keeping to Horatio, because of the presentiment of his own speedy death. It will justify before the world the avenging blow which he is soon to strike. It will unmask the seeming virtuous villain, and consign him to everlasting infamy.

Hence, with a sense of thankfulness for the unexpected proof which he procured solely by the intervention of a higher power, he openly professes his faith in the guidance of divine Providence:

“There’s a Divinity that shapes our ends,
Rough-hew them how we will.”

His conclusion is approved by his fellow student of philosophy with the emphatic reply, “that is most certain.” Both agree that our rashness or indiscretion sometimes serves us well when our deep plots do fail. Had not the pirate ship failed to overtake the royal vessel on the appointed day, Hamlet on that eventful night, when in mental conflict between hope and despair, would not have been blessed with the happy inspiration of purloining the secret letter of the King, and of substituting a counterfeit; nor would he have returned with the original to Denmark, armed with the first visible and most

absolutely damning proof against the secret criminal. This happy intervention of a higher power, which inspired and aided him to turn his failure to success, is now so clearly seen that, henceforth, he appears more disposed to rely upon its guidance than upon his own unaided efforts.

The metaphor, to *shape our ends*, some say, is borrowed from the making of skewers; but a comparison so feeble and undignified appears unworthy of the grandeur of Hamlet's thought. Far preferable is the opinion which detects in the figure a reference to sculpture. Common artisans may rough-hew a block of marble into the general shape of the statue required; but an artist's skill is further needed to chisel it into the distinctive shape of some individual human form. In the quarry of life, man, from the limitations of his knowledge and experience, can hew out his ends or purposes in the rough; but he needs the aid of the Supreme Artist,—the great First Cause—Who, according to his good pleasure, shapes and completes them to their final and rational form. Divine Providence is the ordination and application of means, by which God leads his creatures to their destined end. To thwart or reject this guidance, is fatuously to risk the attainment of one's destiny. Man is assured of this Providential guidance, if, in conformity with the will of God, he faithfully observe His divine law.

In Hamlet, the Poet gives a dramatic representation of the free will of man under the governance or guidance of the Divine Will—a Will which subordinates in some mysterious and incomprehensible manner all human actions and events to the accomplishment of purposes often inscrutable to the human mind. When, under stress of circumstances, Hamlet had in vain exhausted all his powers of thought and reasoning to lift the veil of darkness which enveloped him, then a mysterious Higher Power came to his aid, and, by the employment

of some seeming unimportant incidents, — means apparently “rash and indiscreet,” struck the hour for immediate and proper action. Before his awakening to the guidance of this Higher Will, we have seen how, in the consciousness of his intellectual dexterity, he had delighted in his skill and rejoiced in the contemplated success of his counterplot. Its apparent failure, as well as the success of his secondary plot, are in harmony with the development of the drama; they are introduced, not to create surprise, but to unfold the character of the hero. For the overruling destiny, which he recognizes, rises above the tumult, and is represented, not as a cold remote power of marble majesty, but in intimate connection with human affairs:

“Reckoning time, whose million’d accidents
 Creep in ’twixt vows, and change decrees of kings,
 Tan sacred beauty, blunt the sharp’st intents,
 Divert strong minds to the course of altering things.”

(Sonnets, CXV.)

These lines read as a commentary on the fortunes of Hamlet, and should, says Professor Minto, be printed at the beginning of all copies of the play, both to emphasize the lofty vein of reflection developed by the Poet as the main effect of the whole, and to undo the wretched criticism that would make it a sermon against procrastination.³⁶

Nothing is more remarkable in Shakespeare’s plays, and nothing contributes more to make them a faithful image of life, than the prominence given to the influence of so-called chance, or of undesigned accidents. As a word, chance has always been, and always will be popularly accepted; and its use is correct in so far as we overlook or ignore, for the moment, the more universal connection of events. That the law of causation is universal in its reach, is maintained by

³⁶ Characteristics of English Poets.

science and religion; and all men practically act upon its assumption. It is strictly and philosophically true that there is no such thing as chance or accident; since these words do not signify anything really existing, anything that is truly an agent or the cause of any event; but they merely signify man's ignorance of the real and immediate cause. Most tragic events turn on most trifling circumstances. The fate of Richard II, is traced to a momentary impulse, — an impulse which cost him his kingdom and his life. Poor Desdemona's fate hangs on the accidental dropping of a handkerchief. The unhappy death of Romeo and Juliet result on the mis-carriage of a letter. The noble Caesar had not met his untimely death, had he not postponed reading the schedule of Artemidorus. Wolsey fell from the full meridian of his glory by a slight inadvertence, which all his deep sagacity could not redeem. But of all the Poet's plays, the predominance of chance over human designs, is most powerfully brought home in the tragedy wherein the fate of Hamlet turns on accident after accident. These fortuitous events are variously denominated, as Destiny, or Fate, or Chance; but, in the poetical religion of Shakespeare, they are recognized as the direction of a Providence that exercises supreme control over human affairs. To the Christian dramatist there can be no such thing as chance, and, accordingly, he expounds to his reader the same idea that has been expressed by a later Catholic poet in the words:

“All nature is but art unknown to thee;
All chance, direction which thou canst not see;
All discord, harmony, not understood;
All partial evil, universal good.”

Because of the error of several commentators, it is important to note that in Shakespeare's view, the guidance of a Higher Power or His intervention does not destroy man's free will, nor

ignore it, nor relieve him from the necessity of guiding his actions aright by the light of reason and the voice of conscience. Hence he places on the lips of the most detestable of his characters, Iago and Edmund, the strikingly distinctive truth that it lies in our free will to be or not to be what we are. Against sceptics and modern Reformers who hold the fatalistic view which disputes or denies freedom of will, Shakespeare unfailingly portrays man, not as the pagan dramatists of old — a hapless, helpless being who is subject, in spite of himself, to a fate, made inevitable by decree of the gods — but as a rational agent, who is the free architect of his own character and the arbiter of his destiny for good or for evil.

Reverting to the text, we see that when the hero of the drama, by reason of the objective difficulties which surround him, is unable, notwithstanding all his efforts, to proceed to his “revenge,” a Higher Power leads him forward with scarce a suspicion of how surely and quickly he is reaching the goal. Accidental was the arrival of the players at Elsinore, yet they enable him to reach, for the first time, a positive conviction of the King’s guilt; accidental was the slaying of Polonius, yet it is the turning point of the play, at which Claudius assuming the aggressive, is in spite of his cunning lured on to judgment; accidental was the delay of the pretended pirate ship, yet it led to another unpremeditated incident, the purloining of the secret letters, which gave Hamlet the only proof he could so far offer the public in justification of his “revenge.”

Of all these accidents, the killing of Polonius was the most important. Though it was a thrust in blind passion and a seeming blunder, the effects of which were completely hidden from Hamlet, yet it was a most opportune and propitious act; for then, when most helpless, Providence stepped in to

direct him and to ripen his cause for victory. That blind stroke of passion, roused the criminal to action for his own safety, which he saw was involved in Hamlet's destruction; and to attain it, he proceeds from crime to crime, only, all unconsciously, to afford the Prince the long-desired public proofs which alone withheld him from striking the avenging blow of justice. At the present stage of the drama, Hamlet's cause is almost ripe for the final act; another has made possible a seeming impossibility. A Providence that never errs is guiding him freely, and shall use his willing arm for the execution of divine judgment. Under the higher guidance of this Providence, Hamlet himself feels that he has almost reached the goal: now, "the readiness is all."

THE FATE OF THE SPIES

At the conclusion of Hamlet's narration, Horatio, in commiseration for the spies, musingly remarks, "so Guildenstern and Rosencrantz go to 't!" Their untimely fate resulted directly from perseverance in their course at sea. Their abandonment of Hamlet to the mercy of the pirates with apparent unconcern is indeed a matter of surprise. The officers of the royal ship were in duty bound to rescue him, bound to pursue the pirate craft, to seize it, or even to destroy it; but this perhaps appeared impossible of achievement. If, when in flight at full speed, they had been overtaken by the pirates, there was little prospect of their overhauling the strange craft as it sped away with Hamlet! In consequence, prudence seemed to dictate the continuance of their course with the hope that Hamlet when released would follow them to England. They had, moreover, to collect the long-delayed tribute money, and to deliver their secret commission to the king.

With the foregoing is involved another question: name-

ly, how far the death of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern may be charged to themselves. It is clear, they believed their embassy to be to Hamlet's disadvantage. Their zeal cannot be excused by the sense of duty; the Poet portrays it as prompted by the baseness of their sycophantic, treacherous nature. By means of the court play, and later by repeated declarations of the king, it was manifest to them that a conflict had arisen in which Claudius feared for his life, and in consequence wished to rid himself forever of the mad Prince. This riddance, they had strong reasons to infer meant nothing less than Hamlet's death. Zeal in the service of the criminal, prompts them, in an alacrity born of foolhardiness, to rush in between the gleaming swords of foes engaged in a fierce combat unto death, and their fate must be charged to their own rashness. Most commentators are in harmony with the clearly expressed views of Professor Werder:

“Where such a tyrant reigns, his servants are always exposed to the very worst that can befall, and, yet at any moment, their ruin may come through circumstances and causes from which nothing may seem more remote than the catastrophe. Whoever serves such a king, and, without any misgivings of his crimes, serves him with ready zeal, upon him death has a claim; and if that claim be made good, he has no right to complain.—These are things in which Shakespeare knows no jesting, because he is so great an expounder of the law—the divine law; and he holds to it as no second poet has done.”

The main question, however, regards Hamlet. Was he justified in saving his own life even though it meant the sacrifice of the spies? The case, it is clear, can be settled only by viewing Hamlet's action subjectively, or by putting ourselves in his place, and considering the circumstances and dictates of conscience under which he acted. Professor Strachey says that in Hamlet's view there is something more than his own life at stake; he is the representative of the

rights and the crown of Denmark, which have been outraged by a murderer and usurper, who, in the absence of the natural heir, murdered the rightful possessor, and by conspiracy seized the crown. These are, indeed extraordinary circumstances — rare in the history of any country — and create a crisis which calls for some superior man to maintain the spirit of the laws, by disregarding their letter for the moment. Hamlet on the testimony of the purgatorial ghost is in the present crisis this superior man; and therefore, to safeguard the interests of his country and to avenge the crown and laws of Denmark, he is in duty bound to put the tyrant to death, and if as a means to that end he is obliged to sacrifice base instruments of the tyrant's will, he is fully justified in doing so. This may have been Hamlet's view.

The Professor's words are weighty, since they are based on facts. Denmark was an absolute monarchy, and on the death of his royal father, Hamlet, the crown prince, became *ipso facto* king. That a usurper by conspiracy seized the crown did not deprive Hamlet of his right, and he remained the *de jure* king. As such he was legally the supreme representative of justice, and, therefore, could according to statute law punish with death any one who directly or indirectly attempted the life of the lawful sovereign and his heirs. If these views were Hamlet's, he could in justice tell Horatio that the death of the spies was not "near his conscience."

It is, moreover, reasonable to assume that under the circumstances Hamlet invoked the well known law of self-defence. Every one has the right to defend his life against the attack of an unjust aggressor. For this he may employ any force, and even if necessary take the life of the unjust assailant. But this right supposes the aggression to be actually begun, at least morally speaking; that the danger of losing life is real; and that there be no other means of escape.

In such an unjust aggression there arises between the assailant and the defendant a conflict of claims to life, in which the right of the defendant evidently prevails, while that of the assailant is there and then suspended. These elementary principles were certainly well understood by Hamlet, a student of philosophy, and he saw them all exemplified in his present situation. He knew that the hireling spies were the willing tools of the chief conspirator against his life; that being *ipso facto* a prisoner in the hands of his enemies on board the royal ship, his voyage to England was a veritable journey to execution; that he was in the same condition as an innocent person conducted to the gallows or the electric chair; and that the whole trip together with its bloody end was morally one action. Death was inevitable, and he saw no other way of escape save by the means he employs.

Why could he not, some one may ask, substitute a letter of totally different contents, say of some other business of a diplomatic nature? It is impossible. Such a letter, he feared, would be ineffectual. He had every reason to think that the associate conspirators, the officers and spies, knew the nature of the secret letter to the English king; knew that the fictitious embassy was arranged solely to effect his death. He further had reason to believe that Claudius, from fear of inaction on the part of the king, had in anxiety given his emissaries secret oral instructions to urge, and even to insist upon his execution. At best, if the English monarch doubted concerning his course of action, he would keep the Prince in custody until he had further heard from Claudius. Hence, under the circumstances, Hamlet saw no other way of saving his life than by the means he employed, and in their use he felt free from guilt, because, under the conditions forced upon him, he acted according to moral principles and the dictates of conscience.

THE INTERIM

Having heard all the details of the King's treacherous design, Horatio expresses feelings of horror in the words, "Why, what a King is this?" Hamlet taking up his thought, emphasizes it by exposing the cankerous nature of the villain, as revealed in his horrid crimes of fratricide, incest, usurpation, and his last attempted murder. With sufficient proof now in his possession to justify his act before the public he expresses by an affirmative question the conviction that he may at last with a clear conscience, strike the blow which will rid suffering humanity from the malignant cancer that feeds upon it. Furthermore, he feels persuaded that to allow the monster to live on, only to ripen in murderous villainies, is to stain his own soul with a most damnable sin.

On hearing Hamlet's firm resolve, Horatio insinuates the necessity of speedy action; the execution of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, which shall soon be made known by the return ship, shall place him in the power of the King:

Horatio. It must be shortly known to him from England

What is the issue of the business there.

Hamlet. It will be short; *the interim is mine;*

And a man's life's no more than to say 'one'.

Standard criticism preserves a common silence concerning these lines which, nevertheless, are replete with surprising revelations. This silence results perhaps from the opposition of the text to the too prevailing yet erroneous view of Hamlet's vacillation or weakness of will. The elliptical phrase, "the time will be short; but the interim is mine," illumines as nothing else his remarkably changed conduct after the return to Denmark with the first tangible and positive proof of the criminal's guilt. It throws new light upon his letter which hastily summoned Horatio to hear words that

will make him dumb. It makes us comprehend his mood when wandering in solemn meditative thought among the graves in the church-yard. It reveals the meaning of his unimpassioned jesting with the clown and his fixed indifference to life or death. It discloses the firm determination underlying the earnest recital of the incidents at sea, when the fighting in his heart would not let him sleep. It is an avowal of a state of mind which no longer impels him to soliloquies of self-accusing and berating the smiling, damned villain, but which is a settled conviction that he may now in "perfect conscience" strike the hated criminal: in a word, with proof at hand, his great resolve is energized into life — his mind is made up. "The interim," though short, "is his."

In a day or two, the vessel returning from England shall be the signal for his own execution. If, therefore, he would save his life, he must slay the lawless murderer before the ship's arrival. It has now become a moral act of self-defence, which he can do in "perfect conscience." Hence, his grim resolve that Claudius shall never hear the news. "The interim is short;" but it shall suffice to expose the secret criminal and rid the land of the hated ghoul. If thereby he himself must fall, so be it. Death has been his daily familiar, since the hour which brought the settled conviction that he will probably lose his own life in the act of "revenge". It is no matter; now or never the blow must be struck. From that eventful day on which he resigned himself to the guidance of the Divinity that shapes our ends, that Divinity has been working in his cause. Even now Claudius, unconsciously but providentially, is arranging the time and place, in fact his messenger is already on the way to summon him to his task, and he is ready — "the readiness is all."

A SPIRIT OF ATONEMENT

The imminent presence of death prompts Hamlet to turn, in troubled conscience, from his calm and firm resolve to the thought of his harsh and inconsiderate treatment of Laertes. The Poet delights to portray, under one form or another, his hero's noble nature, his superb mind rich in high ideals, his will strong in the love of good and hatred of evil, and his conscience, attuned even to the most delicate moral touch. Such a character, magnanimous towards others and severe towards himself, looks habitually upon every act of violence or outburst of passion, how pardonable soever, as a matter of self-accusation and reproach. Hence, before leaving the graveyard, Hamlet had, under the sting of conscience, sought reconciliation with Laertes; and the painful recall of his offence and expression of regret, is but another exhibit of his "most generous nature."

If Hamlet's offensive action was thoughtless and prompted by a sudden impulse of passion, he has since had time to ponder its unwonted harshness, time to reflect that, as his mother was the sole witness of the manner in which Polonius met his sudden death, Laertes as well as others might doubt her testimony. As a strongly interested party, she would naturally do what she could to shield her idolized son. Such a supposition would readily impel a rash and choleric youth, like Laertes, to hold Hamlet morally guilty of his father's death. It was ignorance of this constructive guilt that led Hamlet to contest in heat of passion the grief of Laertes, but now, after calm reflection, he realizes the reasonableness of Laertes' indignation, and generously resolves to make amends, and even to court his good will. He, furthermore, sympathizes with him; for he sees his cause mirrored in his own: both are aggrieved over a

father lost; both from deep affection mourn Ophelia's loss,

“Though there's a difference in each other's wrong.”

When, however, the remembrance of his fault recalls its provocation, he can scarce restrain the thought that Laertes' exaggerated vanity and bombastic grief, sufficiently excused his own “towering passion” and counter bravado. Thus again the two characters are contrasted: while Hamlet in sentiments of sorrow for his fault, resolves to repair it, Laertes in foul conspiracy with the King, is taking immediate steps to execute his murderous plot. Already Hamlet sees looming to view, the royal messenger whom the conspirators have despatched to announce the preliminaries for the “revenge.”

THE ENVOY

The troubled stream of Hamlet's life has settled down to a calm that forebodes a storm, and upon its smooth waters flits about the “waterfly,” Osric. In him, perhaps, the youngest attendant at the court of Claudius, are typified certain shallow courtiers of the Elizabethan age. They were fond of frivolous fribbles, of Euphuisms, and of the commonly affected Sidneian style, and were wont to conceal their emptiness beneath the nicety of borrowed phrases. Hamlet's penetrating mind read Osric's character as an open book. His love of worth and honesty, and his hatred of sham and pretence, caused him to question Horatio, whether or not he knew this approaching “water-fly.” “To fools, whether circuitous like Polonius, or rampant like Laertes,” he was characteristically merciless; but this last intellectual tilt between a foppish dolt on the threshold of life and a stately gentleman but one hour from the grave, is marked by the

same calm patience as that with the knavish sexton in the churchyard.

As a water-fly is an ephemeral creature that, without any apparent purpose, flits or skims about upon the still surface of a stream, Hamlet aptly applies the term to Osric, who as a busy trifler, glides idly over the surface of the tragic pool. He again calls him a "chough," because, chattering by rote in Euphuistic jargon, he resembles a crow or some bird of the jackdaw species. Moreover, by the words "beast and lord of beasts," Hamlet makes a sarcastic stroke at the King for keeping such a dandified blockhead about him. No matter how base a fellow may be, whether a clown or a jackdaw, provided he is lord of large herds of cattle, or owner of expansive domains, he may become the King's bosom friend, and feed at his table. Much amusement is afforded at the expense of Osric. Standing, according to common etiquette, with head uncovered, the young courtier stubbornly resists Hamlet's repeated request to omit the usual ceremony. He thereby reveals his inability to appreciate the delicate refinement of the Prince's higher courtesy.

With hat in hand, Osric proceeds to impress upon Hamlet his exalted idea of Laertes' greatness. Unable to appreciate the nobler intrinsic perfections that alone make a man of genuine worth, the shallow youth dwells in exaggerated description only on those showy external qualities which naturally appeal to his superficial mind. Hamlet, in reply, parodies with ridicule the courtier's inflated style, and, by outdoing his hyperbolical Euphuisms, purposely renders himself unintelligible to the bewildered foolish fop. "Sir," says the Prince, "Laertes suffers nothing in your definement of him. To go into particulars about him, as if one were drawing up an inventory, would only turn men's heads dizzy; and after all, one could make but slow and unsteady progress in trying to

trace his rapid evolutions. But, to speak seriously and truly in praise of him, I do take him to be a combination of great qualities; and his essential virtues are so very rare that, to tell the truth, the only thing like him, is his own image in a mirror. All those who would imitate him, are no more than his shadows.’’

Hamlet, in parodying Osric’s Euphuistic affectations, speaks intentional nonsense, which, though couched in the poor youth’s own style, is, he confessed, unintelligible to him; hence, Horatio exclaims in irony, “What! you can chatter in a strange jargon; can you not understand in the same?” And he prays them to use a common language which both can understand.

When Osric continues to sing Laertes’ supreme excellence, of which he insists Hamlet cannot be ignorant, the latter only further confuses the young courtier, by subtle philosophizing in which he sarcastically insinuates that, though Osric may know Laertes’ supreme excellence, he himself must disclaim such knowledge. To pretend to know Laertes perfectly, is to presume an equality with him: no man can understand that which exceeds his own measure.

After these many idle preliminaries, Osric is finally induced to blurt out the royal message. The King has arranged for an immediate trial of skill with swords, and, presupposing the superiority of Laertes, has wagered that he will not make as much as twelve hits for Hamlet’s nine. Osric is commissioned to announce the Prince’s readiness. “Let the foils be brought; and, if the King holds his purpose, let him come with his attendants to the hall which he knows is Hamlet’s haunt at this the breathing time of day.”

As Osric covers his head, and hastens off, Horatio exclaims, “this lapwing runs away with the shell on his head.” The comparison was perhaps suggested by the tufted head

of the lapwig, or peewit. Moreover, as among contemporary writers of the Poet, the peewit was a common symbol of a forward fool, it is aptly applied to Osric, whom Horatio rates a raw and foolish fellow.

Hamlet's remarks which follow, are usually thought obscure. He speaks ironically of Osric. He sees in him a type of the young courtiers of the day, who, picking up phrases and tricks of style fashionable at the moment, use them without originality and understanding. Their frothy collection of phrases and fashionable prattle, gives them a superficial readiness of slight and cursory conversation, and, like yeast, fills with bubbles the bread of their fantastic opinions; but, if you speak with them with any originality in their own vein or on serious matters, their bubbles burst and "their golden words are spent."

AN URGENT SUMMONS

The conspirators, though sanguine of success, are impatient of delay. At once at Osric's arrival, they despatch a messenger for the purpose of leading Hamlet on to instant action. His words, so striking in their double meaning, are of course not understood by the courtier. Hamlet is "constant to his purpose." He still adheres to the acceptance of the challenge which he made to Osric; but his words have a deeper meaning: his resolve to avenge the murder of his father, remains unchanged, notwithstanding objective difficulties, which have confronted him through these months. Now, with clear proofs of the usurper's crime in hand, he solely awaits the "fitness of the king." These words vividly recall his former unconsciously prophetic words, to strike the King when

. "about some act
That has no relish of salvation in 't."

Such an act is the present conspiracy of Claudius whose purpose is to murder Hamlet by means of the poisoned cup or sword.

“The King and Queen,” says the courtier, “are coming with all their retinue to witness your combat with Laertes.”

“In happy time,” replies Hamlet.

The Queen had not failed to notice the hard feelings of Laertes against her son, and she privately commissions the messenger to say that she desires him to give friendly greeting to the youth, and to treat him courteously before he enters upon the fencing bout.

“She well instructs me,” is Hamlet’s laconic reply.

The exit of the courtier allows Horatio to express in confidence his fears that Hamlet will lose the wager; but the latter, in view of the proffered odds and his daily practice with the rapier during Laertes’ absence in France, entertains no doubt of success. He does, however, disclose his strong presentiment of evil. Perhaps the hostility of Laertes, and the thought of the treacherous King, who has prearranged the contest, are latent elements that rouse him to a sense of imminent danger. His true friend eagerly grasps at the expressed forebodings, as a confirmation of his own misgivings. Aware that Laertes is intent upon avenging the murder of his father, and that he has been further angered by reason of recent humiliations heaped upon him in presence of the whole court, Horatio fears lest in his greater skill, now heightened by madness for revenge, he may make the contest the occasion to inflict a fatal blow on Hamlet. In consequence, while not daring to expose the nature of his fears, he feels impelled by kind solicitude to urge his friend to obey the promptings of his heart.

Hamlet, however, is as usual too honorable to entertain suspicion, and, banishing all doubt and misgivings, even

treats the pain at his heart as of no moment. Such feelings might trouble a woman, but as for himself he defies omens or auguries. Founded neither on reason nor piety, they are expressly forbidden by his religion. Hence, rising above such "fooleries," he finds comfort in the thought that he cannot fall but by permission of Divine Providence. This confidence, based on his Christian Faith, he strengthens by recalling the words of the Savior: "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and not one of them shall fall on the ground without your Father."³⁷

How strongly Hamlet's mind is swayed by his supernatural religion, has been already revealed in many passages. It was most emphasized when, in the recognition of an all-ruling Providence, Who turned the failure of his best efforts to advantage, he resolved henceforth to entrust himself to His guidance. This resolve we see reduced to practice in the present instance; in sublime faith he accepts life or death at the hands of Providence. Almost certain that he shall fall when striking the avenging blow, he leaves his fate to the appointment of a Higher Power. Death is fixed for all, though the hour be uncertain. If he is to die at some future time, it will not be now in the contest with Laertes. In either case, it matters little, since he is ready to lose his life in the performance of a sacred duty: "the readiness is all." Where, how, and when man dies is of small import; but the readiness at the call is of the highest moment. Hamlet's words are a summary of many truths which Christians only can fully comprehend.

HAMLET'S FATALISM

That commentators for the most part ignore Hamlet's religious belief and seek to prove from the text his accept-

³⁷ Matt. X, 29.

ance of fatalism, must appear strange to Catholic readers; and the more so, since the very same passage offers an emphatic refutation of the dream. If paganism and Christianity are as contrary as black and white, no less so are fatalism and Catholicity. If the fatalism of the ancient pagan world has, under a modified form, found acceptance with many non-religious men of our times, as well as with a modern Christian sect whose fundamental doctrine is the harsh and indefensible belief that God positively creates certain men unto salvation, and others unto damnation; nevertheless, neither in Hamlet's age nor in our own has it found an entrance into the Christian Church of the ages. On the contrary, fatalism, most pernicious under every form, she has always condemned as unscriptural and heretical.

Fatalism is well expounded in Greek tragedy. These classic plays picture man's life so rigorously predetermined in all its details that his own volitions have no power to alter the course of events. Ruled by destiny, which was blind, arbitrary, and relentless, he moved inexorably onward to his fate. This harrowing doctrine was dealt a death-blow by Christianity. The new religion, under the illumination of divine revelation made man's free will the central fact of the Christian conception of human life. But with freedom came man's moral responsibility, which is measured by a code of laws proceeding from the sovereign of the universe; and these bear a sanction of reward or punishment, precisely because man is free to choose between good and evil. Shakespeare, as a Christian, rejected the fatalism of the Greek tragedians. In no one of his tragedies does he picture the suffering of the hero as arbitrarily predetermined without relation to his own thoughts and action. If aught is certain in the play of *Hamlet*, it is the hero's Catholicity. He proves it in the present text by his rejection of fatalism with its superstitious

belief in "auguries" and such like "fooleries," and again by his profession of Christian Faith in an all-ruling Divinity. But unlike the fatalist, he sees in the direction of Providence, not a blind, but a rational guidance of an intellectual agent. It neither shackles man's free will, nor destroys his liberty of action.

This error of certain commentators concerning Hamlet's fatalism is, no doubt, due to their ignoring the influence of his Catholic Faith upon his thoughts and actions, and attempting to interpret the text in harmony with their own religious beliefs, or in support of their subjective theory. But their belief in regard to Divine Providence differs radically from Hamlet's, and his was that of the olden Church. This difference is ultimately traced to divergent views concerning man's free will. The view, common to modern sects, originated with the religious "Reformers" of the sixteenth century. They taught that original sin had not merely weakened man's will, but had deprived him of all freedom regarding works morally good or bad; and, as a consequence, we are no longer free to choose between moral good or evil. This fundamental doctrine destroys man's free will, leaves him but a blind instrument in the hands of fate. It is an error most lamentable in its many evil consequences, and is diametrically opposed to the hero's Catholic Faith.

According to Hamlet's religion, concupiscence is not original sin, as thought the "Reformers," but only one of its effects; and while weakening man's inclination to good, it does not corrupt his nature, nor destroy his free will. Moreover, the Creator, in the government of human affairs, respects the freedom with which He endowed the rational nature of his grandest handiwork, and in accordance, makes His providential guidance dependent upon man's free cooperation. Man, therefore, in his moral freedom of action, can

with full liberty of will accept or reject the influence of Providence; and upon this acceptance or rejection depends his eternal loss or gain. Hence, as a consequence of our gift of rational freedom, we become the arbiters of our own destiny. "To them that love God,"—and only such accept His guidance—"all things work together unto good."³⁸ Such was the Christian belief of Hamlet, and his words read in this light reveal him, not a fatalist, but a sincere and well-instructed Christian.

The last clause in which the hero dwells upon his own indifference to life in confirmation of his resignation to the will of Providence, has been considered obscure, and its obscurity had led to varied corruptions of the text.³⁹ But this obscurity vanishes, if we consider that the clause takes its meaning from preceding thoughts with which it bears the intimate relation of cause and effect, and is, moreover, colored by the Christian sentiment, which underlies the whole paragraph.

The current reading is the amended text of Dr. Johnson. His intimate knowledge of the Catholic religion was to him a light in the darkness that enveloped others who were either unwilling or unable to comprehend the Christian truths that animated and directed Hamlet's process of thought. He affirms that, as in the sparrow's fall, so in his own, there is a special Providence. If he fall now or later, what matters it, provided he be ready? Readiness for the summons is the all important thing. Why then, since he is ready, should he yield to the common instinct, by wishing for a longer life? As no man can foresee what good or evil other years may

³⁸ Rom. VIII, 28.

³⁹ The Second Quarto (1604) reads: "Since no man of ought he leaves knows what is't to leave betimes let be." "The First Folio" (1623) has: "Since no man has ought of what he leaves, what is't to leave betimes?"

have in store for him, he cannot know whether death cuts him off from happiness or calamity.

Only for a moment does the shadow of death flit before his mind, and cause him a pain at heart. But without faltering, he soon resumes his wonted calm and determination. He seems to recognize in the King's second subterfuge of the prearranged contest with Laertes, the Providential opportunity he has been awaiting. In vision he sees himself with weapon in hand in presence of the royal court, when the King is not engaged in prayer, but with murder in his heart. It is the one awaited opportunity, and he shall meet it with the "readiness" which has never relaxed through all the interruptions of events.

RECONCILIATION

Hamlet's philosophizing is checked by the entrance of the King and Queen with their full retinue. The contest is to be in public view of the whole court, and every courtier is present, anxious to witness the display of skill. Claudius in wonted hypocrisy advances, leading Laertes by the hand, and requests the Prince to clasp it in token of reconciliation and friendship. Hamlet, "most generous and free from all conniving," is true to his resolve to "court the favor" of Ophelia's brother. The thought of death before him, his own desire is to be at peace with all the world. Confessing in superabundant penitence the wrong he has done Laertes, he, in princely courtesy, appeals for forgiveness to his honor as a gentleman. Though his conduct was such as should offend Laertes' honor, and stir his very nature to rebellion, yet in extenuation, he reminds him of the "sore distraction" whereby he is known to be afflicted. It was not a friend that wronged a friend; Hamlet gone mad was not Hamlet himself, and, therefore, when in madness he offended Laertes, he

therein wronged himself, for "his madness is poor Hamlet's enemy."

He plays upon the word "madness" in a double sense. In the one case, he refers to Laertes' knowledge of the common opinion, which reputed him stricken with insanity, and, therefore, morally unaccountable for the death of Polonius, for his harsh treatment of Ophelia, and his strange conduct at her grave. He is least concerned with the last; for he knows that Laertes' resentment arises chiefly from the death of his father and his sister. But in palliation he cannot plead the actual circumstances under which he slew Polonius, even though these exonerate him from guilt, because they are strictly secret to his mother and himself; nor can he explain the reason of his unkindness to Ophelia, since it would inculpate both Laertes and his father. In the other case the term madness implies, not his supposed mental derangement, but the anger and fury which in wildness of passion overcame him, when, mistaking Polonius, concealed behind the arras, for the murderous usurper, he slew him in an impulse of overmastering rage. Again, "madness" refers to the uncontrolled passion which swayed him at Ophelia's grave, when he saw Laertes unbecomingly parade his exaggerated grief before the royal court. Abhorring all shams and pretences, he felt himself aroused to indignation and to flaming anger; for he looked upon such theatrical show as a desecration of Ophelia's memory, and a challenge to his own genuine and supreme love. In both instances, "madness" is synonymous with an outburst of anger, which often by its vehemence, deprives a man for the time of the use of reason.

Consistently portrayed through the drama as a Christian gentleman of perfect self-control, Hamlet exemplifies in himself more than once the Christian axiom: "The patient man is better than the valiant: he that ruleth his spirit,

than he that taketh cities.”¹ A man’s blind and irrational passions are his worst enemies. Accordingly, the Prince, notwithstanding his just provocation, could in apology truthfully affirm, “His madness is poor Hamlet’s enemy.” In the consciousness that he had offended Laertes publicly, in presence of the whole court, he, in a Christian sense of duty, now makes before the same audience an amende honorable. Disclaiming any malice or purposed wrong, he concludes in the hope that his “brother,” a noble youth of “most generous thoughts,” will recognize in his conduct nothing more than an accidental and undesigned offence.

The grandeur of Hamlet’s character, as revealed in his frankness, sincerity, and noble sentiments, deepens by contrast the ignoble traits of the murderous conspirator. Laertes’ egotistic sensitiveness, his petty concern to maintain the good opinion of his world, and his esteem for social customs rather than for the claims of conscience and of natural affection, are all qualities indicative of the artificial, and not of the true gentleman. His reply unmasks his hypocrisy, and discloses that association with the royal conspirator has rapidly developed his natural aptitude for treachery and cunning. Resolved upon the murder of Hamlet, and, in consequence, heedless of his proffered renewal of friendship, he meets his frankness with artifice and duplicity.

In his words, the Poet gives a satirical stroke at the notion of fantastical, or artificial honor which was common to youths of the day. Laertes pretends that, though Hamlet has satisfied his natural feelings of resentment, yet his sense of honor demands that in deference to public opinion and to custom he must delay reconciliation until by an appeal to the court of honor, he may learn whether he should insist on a further and more rigorous vindication of his wounded man-

¹ Prov. XVI, 32.

hood. Such courts, more or less common among warlike peoples, were supreme tribunals, which regulated the practice of duelling, and decided upon the justice of the cause which prompted the challenger's appeal to arms. By his insinuation of a duel, which would keep "his name ungored," Laertes, no doubt, intended to construct a rampart of defence, in case his murderous design on Hamlet should be crowned with success. He concludes his reply with the false promise that, in the meanwhile, he accepts in like affection Hamlet's sincerely offered love. But, with fingers itching for that unbated and envenomed sword, and with thoughts as black as his words are treacherous, he utters a second falsehood in the promise, "not to wrong" that love.

Hamlet, in reply, accepts Laertes' "offered love" in words which, though brief, are hearty and full of princely courtesy. His refined moral nature bars him from suspecting that a man whom he has always assumed to be "a very noble youth"—a man whom even now he has heard in loud defence of his manhood and knightly honor, could descend to anything so abysmally vile as the treachery which blackens Laertes' mind and heart. Even a suspicion of so foul a deed was most abhorrent to a man who, in real nobility of nature, was most truthful, and sincere, and generous. Hence, though watchful amid the assembled court, and keenly alert against any trickery by Claudius, he has not the least mistrust of his knightly opponent. In accepting to play the wager, Hamlet again calls Laertes, "brother:" a relationship in likelihood suggested by his tender memory of Ophelia. He compliments his brother upon his mastery of the sword; and, in punning, promises to be his "foil." As a foil, or gold-leaf is used to heighten the lustre of a gem, so, Hamlet shall cause Laertes to shine by contrast in starry brilliancy.

THE CONTEST

Stirred to impatience by these verbal delays, Claudius commands the combatants to take the swords, and reminds Hamlet of the wager. The word, "odds" is used in different senses by Hamlet and the King; with the former, it refers to the value of the stakes which Claudius has wagered: namely—six Barbary horses against six precious hilted rapiers, and poniards with their trappings; with the King, on the other hand, it signifies the three off-hits, or points which he concedes to Hamlet, as a fair offset to his opponent's superior skill. While from the many weapons offered, Laertes in secret chooses his own unbated and "anointed" blade, Hamlet, unsuspecting, merely queries whether the foils be of equal length.

In regal state, surrounded by his minions, lords, and courtiers, sits enthroned in the great hall "the smiling damned villain." Gazing about him in gloating vision, his countenance beaming forth in elation of mind and heart, he revels in the assured success of his cunning. All is in readiness for the pageant of death: before him are the appointed judges or umpires with Osric at their head, and before him stands the easy and ready victim, unsuspecting, passionless, and powerless. No longer need he fear the pursuing hand of vengeance, which threatens the loss of life and crown. The dread secret again all his own, he shall enjoy undisturbed the peaceful fruition of his crime.

Though happy at heart, he does not forget his cunning. To safeguard his treachery from suspicion, he proclaims with ready hypocrisy and joyful mood that the fencing bout shall be celebrated with all the gladness of a festal day. In mirthful tones, he commands that the merry stoups of wine be set upon the public table, and that, at Hamlet's first hit, pealing trumpets shall blare forth the fact, and great cannons from

near battlements shall roar it to the heavens. He himself shall drink in joy to the Prince's health, and, in earnest of good will, shall put, as a present in the latter's cup, a union, or rich oriental pearl of unsurpassed value. Thus revelling by anticipation in the success of his plot, Claudius hopes by the manifestation of unrestrained joy, which is partly real and partly feigned, to guard against suspicion, both in Hamlet's and in the public mind. In fine, after warning the judges, to be opened-eyed and wary, he, all impatient for the issue, commands the combatants to begin.

THE FIRST BOUT

When after a few passes, Hamlet makes the first hit, the blast of trumpets awakens to voice the thundering guns. The first bout is over; but the second is stayed by the King, who has risen in surprise—and manifest excitement. Ordering on the instant two cups of wine, he deftly lets fall into one a poison-drop instead of the precious pearl: and, as a courtier presents the drink to Hamlet, Claudius himself seizing the other cup, invites him, amid the joyful din of roaring guns, to drink his health with him. In his overmastering impatience, born of his thirst for Hamlet's blood, he cannot kill him fast enough.

As the scene advances, Hamlet's situation grows most pathetic. Lured into the snare of his deadly foe, he stands face to face with the usurper and his sycophantic court, ready with sword in hand to defend his life, all unconsciously, against an enemy who, rejecting reconciliation, has sworn to be satisfied with nothing less than his destruction. The conspirators have decreed his butchery there and then, in order to make a Danish holiday.

In that concourse, Hamlet finds no sympathy, save that of the lone Horatio and his unsuspecting mother; the former,

by his clouded countenance, reveals a depression of heart, which arises from some indistinct forebodings of evil; the latter, still infatuated with her incestuous lord and unable even to dream of treachery, gloats in pride of maternal love upon her noble son. Hamlet himself feels instinctively that "the smiling villain" has some new stratagem afoot, and resolves in watchfulness and wariness to await its development.

In a fearlessness born of a brave nature, he faces undaunted the hated criminal, confident of his own ability to overmatch his cunning, and to turn his knavery against him. From the time he placed himself in the hands of Providence, he felt that Divinity was shaping his ends; was ripening the harvest for him: and now, as he stands with sword in hand, before the enthroned criminal and his glittering court, he is almost certain that the one supremely favorable moment is at hand. No longer is delay forced upon him, since he has in his possession the long-looked-for proof of the criminal's guilt. Now, therefore, may he at last with a clear conscience strike the avenging blow. The awaited opportunity has come; "the readiness is all."

Hamlet's intimate knowledge of the King's character enables him to thwart the cunning, concealed in the proffered cup. The known depravity of Claudius, his unnatural crime and innate treachery, his lately discovered plot to silence in death the one witness against him, his arrangement of the contest, his presiding thereat in manifestly exaggerated glee, and his urging upon his nephew the cup into which he had dropped that specious pearl:—are elements, all combining to engender strong suspicion in the Prince who, alert at every turn against his uncle's perfidy, has come to trust him as he would "adders fanged." Hence, without hesitation, he waves aside the tempting cup. "By and by" he will attend to it; "by and by," when the play at swords is done,

he will force the King himself to taste the virtue of the "union" in that cup.

THE SECOND TRIAL

The second bout begins, and as Laertes simply plays with Hamlet, the latter soon makes another hit. The Queen, however, at the sight of her son's shortness of breath and brow suffused with perspiration, addresses him in maternal solicitude. The expression "fat," as applied to Hamlet, is a source of difficulty. A fat Hamlet is, says Lowell, as inconceivable as is a lean Falstaff. Moreover, such a phrase must be considered an unpoetic description of the "glass of fashion, and the mold of form."

If unsuited to the Prince, it was, however, most appropriate to Richard Burbage, who, as the star tragedian of Shakespeare's company, impersonated Hamlet. As he was a portly man of large physique, it was natural that the strenuous exertion called forth in the repeated fencing bouts, should bring out the fact that he was "fat" or out of training, as well as "scant of breath." Hence, as tradition affirms, the word was inserted in the text, in deference to the portly form of Burbage. He was the first and last "fat" Hamlet. Since his day, the unvarying and popular impersonations of the Prince, have been—in accordance with the exigencies of the drama,—lean Hamlets. In consequence, the word "fat," though retained in the text, has come to mean merely that the Prince was out of training.

As the second bout closes, the Queen is overjoyed. Yielding to her self-indulgent nature, she reaches for the evil cup and, unsuspecting, announces her purpose to "carouse" to her son's "fortune." The King is at once alarmed and exclaims, "Gertrude do not drink." Her rash act instantly draws from Hamlet the warning expostulation, "*Good*

Madam!" When, however, she persists, he again cautions her by guarded but emphatic voice, "*I dare not drink yet madam.*" But mistrusting nothing, the Queen, heedless of his warning, fatuously drinks of the fated cup.

THE FINAL BOUT

Thus far, Laertes without great exertion had stood cautiously on the defensive with the unbated sword. He and the royal conspirator had, no doubt, agreed that, to guard their plot from suspicion, a few bouts should be played before the fatal stroke. At the beginning of the third trial, Laertes reminds the King that the opportune time had come. In an aside, however, he gives ear to the voice of his disturbed conscience; but its wee, wee voice, he quickly smothers, as he had so often done before in his habitually wayward life. His musing is brief; his antagonist eagerly summons him to begin the third bout.

Without dreaming of the cause, Hamlet had perceived that in the preceding plays, Laertes had not fenced with vigor, and now challenges him to "pass with his best violence." Laertes, thereupon, assumes the offensive, and by vigorous play soon wounds Hamlet. The latter, cut unexpectedly, is at once stung into fiery action. With the warm blood coursing from the wound, quick as a flash comes the thought of perfidy, and with eagle-glance, he sees its proof in the crimsoned, unbated point of Laertes' sword. With a brief scornful glare, now at the base ignoble youth, and now at the abhorred criminal, he realizes in the stratagem of the present fencing bout, their murderous design upon his life. Quick is his resolve to seize that treacherous, unbated weapon which is already anointed with his blood, and to do a bloody deed that shall forever bar the miscreant from further crime. One reproachful look at the

dishonored youth, and then, letting loose his pent-up strength, he rushes, like a tiger, in the fury of momentary madness, upon his insidious foe, and, by an unexpected terrible blow, strikes the deadly weapon from Laertes' hand. A scuffle ensues. Laertes struggles fiercely to regain his sword; he fears its possession by Hamlet means his own certain death. Brief is the struggle; baffled by the Prince's superior strength, Laertes loses the prize, and is reluctantly obliged in self-defence to take up Hamlet's rejected foil; and, though battling bravely against the terrific passes of his furious antagonist, he is soon wounded by his own perfidious blade.

No stage-directions are found in the original Quartos nor in the subsequent Folios concerning the manner in which the rapiers were exchanged. The description in our modern text was inserted by Rowe. Its obscurity has given rise to various explanations. One opinion suggests that as soon as Laertes perceives Hamlet to be inflamed to anger by his wound, he attempts to disarm him by gripping the hilt of his sword; but Hamlet, in accordance with the code, resorts to the same manœuvre, and so the two exchange weapons. Another opinion, exemplified by Whiteside and Salvini, once famous impersonators of Hamlet, supposes that the Prince, after being wounded, disarms Laertes, and, as the latter stoops to regain his rapier, Hamlet puts his foot thereon, at the same time holding out with a scornful look, his own weapon to his rival. Laertes, forced with great reluctance to take it, receives a few moments later his death thrust from the unbated and envenomed sword, which Hamlet had seized from the floor.

Different, however, was the practice of Booth. "Hamlet secures Laertes' foil by a powerful parry of his thrust in *carte*, by which he disarms him; catching the foil with the

left hand as it leaves Laertes' grasp, he uses it as a dagger, being too close to him for a free use of his own weapon." If such action be excused on the plea that Hamlet is "incensed" and excited, and that Laertes is barred from demanding fair play, since he has been foul from the start; it is, nevertheless, not suggested by the text, and, moreover, seems in contradiction to Hamlet's noble and generous nature. With Laertes' deadly weapon in hand, he had no need, though "incensed," to resort to so base a practice.

TREACHERY! SEEK IT OUT

The King is satisfied that his nephew's bleeding wound assures the success of the plot, and commands the combatants to be parted. But Hamlet is not satisfied. His fierce reply, "Nay, nay, come, again!" indifferent whether it be Laertes or the crowned criminal,—should have aroused fear in the heart of Claudius. How like a wounded lion, the stricken Prince faces undaunted that mute assembly, and with that uplifted avenging sword, holds all at bay, fearless against further treachery. Glaring about with eyes aglow with fire, and breathing defiance to the usurper and his court, his is the majesty and mien of the Nemesis of justice. Scarcely has he uttered his challenge of defiance, before a great disturbance arises. The courtiers pointing towards the writhing Queen, exclaim in excitement: "Look to the Queen there, ho!" Gertrude, helpless in the clutch of death, had fallen prostrate to the floor, dying in a paroxysm of agony.

Amid the commotion, the King is the first to speak. He seeks to cloak his villainy with words of cunning falsehood, words, which instead of sheltering his hypocrisy, rouse the dying Queen to expose his villainy. Too late had she realized the import of Hamlet's warning words; and, now expiring, she calls upon her son, and, before that wondering assem-

bly, exposes with dying voice the crime of her treacherous consort. Her public confession, so confirmatory of Hamlet's fears, startles him into wondrous energy of action. Horror-stricken at the murder of his mother, a spirit of revulsion racks his whole being; flushes his face with anger; flames his heart to vengeance; and, as he points at the usurper, now pallid and cowering beneath the sense of his exposed guilt, he exclaims, with accusing voice alive with passion, O, villainy, villainy!

Beside the corpse of his mother, he stands like the dread angel against the hordes of evil. He sweeps his gleaming sword in semi-circle about him, while scanning one by one with rapid glaring eye, each of the surrounding nobles. Then with a loud voice which commands obedience he cries, "treachery! seek it out! Let the door be locked against the criminal's escape!" Those words seal the doom of Claudius.

The exigencies of the tragedy required Shakespeare to picture Hamlet, not in the bright sunshine of young and buoyant life, but enwrappt with oppressive clouds of gloom; yet, at the supreme crisis, he could not fail to give us, through a brief rift of those clouds, a glimpse of his best beloved hero: and he exhibits him, while laboring in the pangs of death, soaring magnanimous of soul above the sufferings of earth, and disclosing to the last his accustomed sweetness of nature, nobility of mind, generosity of heart, love of good, hatred of hypocrisy and vice; and all crowned with a glorious heroic power of action.

Of this latent power of action the Prince was ever conscious. It had never failed him at need, and would, he was sure, respond to his call at the right moment. But that moment never came till now. Never before could he strike the avenging blow, unless he would "taint his soul;" unless, unmindful of his honor, which he treasured more than life,

he would like a madman do a deed that would at once enshrine Claudius as a martyr in the annals of his country, and leave to posterity his own name attainted by the infamy of a traitor who by an assassin's stroke had attempted to gain the throne. Such was not the task, as he understood it, the task imposed upon him by the heaven-sent purgatorial ghost. Its mandate surely did not call for a private, vindictive, and unchristian stroke of revenge, but rather for one approved by conscience and the principles of his religion. It could only mean a public act of complete retributive justice, and involved the unmasking of the hypocrite, the exposure of his crimes, and the privation of the crown and Queen. That such an act of retributive justice would be possible in the public contest arranged by his enemy, he had divined at its announcement, and instantly resolved to accept the opportunity.

If we reflect upon Hamlet's singular position in the present crisis, the scene so thrilling and so awe-inspiring assumes indeed a grander aspect. Assembled in that royal hall are all the majesty and power of Denmark. Around him are the nobles of the realm, the representatives and guardians of law and justice. In their midst sits enthroned the *de facto King*, and before them stands sword in hand the heaven-appointed avenger of crime. As the *de jure King*, he is the highest legal representative of justice. This royal assembly is, under the circumstances, the supreme tribunal of the nation. The judges are the nobles, the culprit is the murderous usurper, the prosecutors are the inculpating witnesses, and Hamlet, the divinely appointed avenger, shall as the *de jure King* exercise the royal prerogative in the execution of the convicted criminal. The confession of Claudius is no longer indispensable. Others testify against him: the paramour of his guilt, the instruments of his treachery, and his stricken

fellow-conspirator, all accuse him. Before the judges lies the corpse of the Queen, who with dying voice testified against her incestuous husband; before them lies the prostrate Laertes, the self-confessed associate and instrument of the royal criminal, and to their wondering ears he unravels the murderous plots of the "smiling damned villain:" and all, the Queen, Laertes, Hamlet, and the poisoned bowl and blade cry aloud the guilt of the multi-murderer. His crimes thus exposed and proven before the representatives of the nation, the avenger may now with public approval drag the monster from the throne, and by a supreme act of retributive justice despatch him to his last account.

OVERTAKEN BY NEMESIS

The catastrophe rushes on in a storm of wondrous rapidity. Quick was the judgment, quicker still was its fulfilment in the one stroke which overwhelms us with surprise. All the while Hamlet, with his firm grasp on the avenging sword, had in feverish impatience been listening to Laertes' confession; but when at the tale of the "anointed" blade, he realizes that in the train of the poison coursing through his arteries, death is stealthily creeping on him, he hears the call to instant action; hears it reverberating loud as a trumpet's blast, and with flaming eyes fixed on the enthroned murderer, he pauses but a moment, as the panther when crouching for the leap, and then, quick as the lightning flash, delivers the death blow to the cowering criminal.

At last, when the hapless Claudius is quivering in affright, pierced by the envenomed blade, all his attendants, lords and soldiers, find their voices and exclaim, "treason! treason!" In reply, the bleeding King piteously appeals to his friends, "come, defend me yet; I am but hurt." These words so characteristic, exhibit him to the last, the type of strength

and quick decision. Aware that his wound from the poisoned sword is mortal beyond repair, yet from horror of the judgment awaiting his crime, he clings tenaciously, though despairingly to the hope of life. But not one of that sycophantic crew dare cross at the risk of life the path of that solitary champion of the grave. His eyes afire with anger, his countenance suffused with the rage of a wounded lion, he stands defiant, a giant of strength with gleaming sword extended, and before him, all recoil in fear as from some dread avenging angel, panic stricken with terror and dismay.

In vain was the bleeding criminal's appeal for help. His words only roused the avenger the more. In one instant rushing forward, Hamlet clutches the trembling and terrified monarch, drags him from the throne, pinions him to earth between his feet, and forces 'the potent poison' down his reluctant throat, exclaiming the while in maddening rage: "O thou incestuous, murderous, damned Dane, drink off this potion! Is thy union here? Follow my mother!" The awful irony of those terrible words were bitterer than the poisoned bowl. A moment more, and the criminal writhing with the throes of death shrivels up soul and body in the fiery furnace of the avenger's wrath. Vengeance comes in a more comprehensive form of justice, than Hamlet could have devised, and even executed by his own unaided power. Claudius at last overtaken in an "act that has no relish of salvation in it," is surprised by death, which without warning hurries his soul still more polluted to the dread account before the "Everlasting Judge." His end seems a "retribution so righteous and complete, that it resembles less a human intervention than a divine dispensation."⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Cf. Essay on Hamlet, G. Miles.

THE FELL SERGEANT

In his dying prayer, Laertes reveals his better self, and stirs us to compassion. He had been heedless of religion throughout his youthful life, and deaf to the voice of conscience, but his sickly faith now quickens into healthy action at the touch of the grim awakener death. Feeling himself sinking into eternity his conscious guilt of wilful murder weighs heavy on his soul. Malevolence, which had previously inspired him to spurn reconciliation with his intended victim, now gives way to remorse, and remorse, engendering a spirit of repentance, impels him to crave forgiveness. Poorly instructed in the moral law, he does not comprehend the difference between a wilful and an unwilful act, and, therefore, assuming Hamlet to be as guilty as himself, he prays: "Mine and my father's death come not upon thee." The Prince, however, ignores the implied charge of guilt; he feels no qualm of conscience. Always actuated, as the drama shows, by Christian principles; always sensitive to every evil that might tarnish the lustre of his conscience; he is buoyed up in the face of death, by an assured sense of rectitude. He knows that, according to strict principles of Christian morals, he is in the eyes of God guiltless of Polonius' unintended or accidental death; furthermore, he knows that he is innocent of Laertes' death; since it is due, not to his slight wound, but to the poison of his own fell contrivance, of which he was wholly ignorant; again, he knows that, in striking down the incestuous usurper, he was merely executing the decree which Heaven's preternatural messenger had promulgated for the vindication of the laws of state and religion; and, therefore, in a calm of conscience, undisturbed by the spectre, death, he is ready to enter the spirit world without fear or terror. Moved, however, to compassion by Laertes' sincere contrition, he feels inspired by Christian charity

to forgive his dual act of treachery, and in heart-felt prayer, implores Heaven to forgive his murderer.

No expiring tragic character appears so pathetically grand as this young Prince in his dying thoughts and sentiments. That cruel poison, having ravaged through life's arteries, has, in fine, reached his heart. As he feels the chilling, relentless hand of death tightening its grasp upon him, he casts a last look on the pitiful scene about him. Near is his mother's corpse, and its sight, recalling her unfortunate end, stirs him to poignant grief, "wretched Queen, adieu!" It is a vain adieu: for his grief is further burdened by the thought that she died, unprepared, overtaken in her sin. False to her promise of repentance, she had spurned the call of grace, and, persevering in her incestuous union, she was pitilessly stricken by stealthy death, dying as she lived.

His gaze is next fixed on the hapless courtiers "that look pale and tremble" at the havoc. They stand before him, a mute audience; gladly would he satisfy the expectant, hungering look which he sees reflected from each face; but, as the pains of dissolution are already sapping his manly strength and blunting his senses, he perceives his life is ebbing very fast. His inability to tell that mute and wondering audience his sad tale in defence of his princely name and honor, is his last greatest grief. In extremity, he relies upon his loved and trusted friend. He shall survive, and, by exposing his "cause aright" to the "unknowing world," shall, by the light of truth, shield his name from dishonor.

AN ANTIQUE ROMAN

Horatio, however, will not hear of it. The thought of parting from his true friend, stirs his strong, manly love, usually so silent and unobtrusive. Deep streams flow on in a silent calm, undisturbed, save by the violence of storms;

and overpowering grief is the storm which now agitates Horatio's mind and heart. The sincerity of his love seems challenged by Hamlet's words, "Horatio, I am dead; thou livest." Undivided in life, why should they be divided by death? The storm raging in his aggrieved heart, blinds him for the moment to reason and the sense of duty; and, in consequence his conscience benumbed by sorrow yields to sentiments natural to an "antique Roman." An eager glance at the poisoned cup, and he quickly reaches out to seize the same, exclaiming, "Here's yet some liquor left."

Hamlet instantly divines the import of Horatio's words, and is horror-stricken at the thought of his madly rash and unchristian purpose. He himself, when afflicted by an overpowering sense of evil, had been tempted against the canon of the Almighty, but, with Christian fortitude, had conquered the temptation. He is, therefore, surprised at the weakness of a man like Horatio, who, little given to emotion, is known for uncommon fortitude, and calm, solid judgment. Fearing, however, lest his friend, now blinded by grief and unreasoning sentiment, may, in the forgetfulness of duty, yield to his present rash and unmanly impulse, Hamlet is roused to a struggle of stern resistance, in order to save Horatio from himself. Though bleeding, reeling, dying, yet by powerful energy of will, he summons all his strength to wrestle a moment for victory—for the life of his grief-stricken and devoted friend. The dying hero's struggle "has more the flash of motion of a Homeric god than of a man." Seizing the cup, while exclaiming in anxious pleading tones, "as thou art a man, let go! by Heaven I'll have it!" he wrenches it from the grasp of Horatio, and as quickly dashes from him, its fell contents—the love-potion of his friend.

Hamlet observes that Horatio, distracted by an all-absorbing grief, fails to grasp the meaning and importance of

his request; in consequence, he again urges him in most explicit and pathetic terms. It is his only thought and weighs heavily upon him. He foresees that his action may be ascribed to impulse; that his long silent struggle in the pursuit of a "revenge" that would meet with a just and public approval, may be never known to Denmark; that the story of his sad, harsh fate, and of a duty all done, may remain untold, and he, the last scion of a lapsed dynasty, may go down to the grave, a reputed madman, traitor, and assassin, and so leave an honored name disgraced forever in the annals of his country. The very thought, the very fear afflicts him. To his refined ethical nature, imbued with the highest sentiments of honor, such a fear engenders supreme mental anguish. This anguish is again voiced in his pathetic appeal: "O good Horatio, what a wounded name, things standing thus unknown, shall live behind me!" His anxieties, watchings, and untiring efforts, all through the months of delay, had been to preserve his Christian manhood and princely honor from contamination; and now he begs, he entreats, he implores his friend in token of his strong affection, to defer following him to future felicity awhile, in order that, tarrying in this "harsh world" a little longer, he may heal his wounded name by satisfying the expectant ear of Denmark.

HIS DYING MOMENTS

Hamlet's fierce struggle for the cup, and his heart-rending appeals to Horatio, have overtaxed his sinking energies, and strengthened the grasp of death. "The potent poison," he tells his friend, already seems to crow in victory over his dying form. He feels himself in the throes of dissolution: his senses are waning fast; an increasing coldness benumbs his limbs; his eyes grow glazed and sightless; his lips are parched and parted; and his pallid face assumes an ashen

hue. His afflicted friend kneels in deep affection beside him, anxious to catch his dying words. "In that supreme hour, his mission accomplished, winning, not losing the cause for which he dies; assured through Horatio of the verdict of posterity, and calmly fronting the dread tribunal of eternity with an inviolate conscience," Hamlet is troubled but by one thought, and that thought is for the good, for the peace and prosperity of his country. In words, slow, faint, and labored, he tells Horatio that he, the last of a royal line, chooses prince Fortinbras for the succession. Him, he is also to acquaint with the cause that prompted the "revenge."

In a sense of duty all performed, Hamlet now turns without regret from this harsh world and all its temporal interests to give the few remaining moments of lingering life to thoughts of his eternal interests in a better world. The moments seem to drag on slowly, as Horatio in vain listens hungrily for other words; but, only after hard pressure of Hamlet's pulse, does he catch in calm, though feeble and almost inaudible accents the last and significant utterance of his expiring friend:

"Farewell, Horatio, Heaven receive my soul."

These are his last dying words, as found in the original text of 1603. In our modern composite version they have been substituted by the words, "*the rest is silence.*"⁴¹ "Alas, silence for the lips whose music has had no equal since the birth of time; silence for the voice whose least recorded utterance remains an inspiration for all the ages!" It is a silence full of significance, a silence pervading his last and most momentous moments in which, concentrating undisturbed all his mental energies on his soul, he communes with himself, takes account

⁴¹ Not a few annotators maintain that these words belong to Horatio, who on observing Hamlet's inability to speak more, says in sorrow, "the rest is silence".

of himself before his immediate flight to the undiscovered country. If the world which he has sacrificed so willingly for the sake of sacred duty, is fading from his dimmed eyes, nevertheless, in that silence, he is not engulfed in an everlasting night; for upon the clear mental vision of his soul, regenerated and illumined by Christian faith, stream increasing beams of light from a purer, happier world. All his thoughts and affections are fixed on that glorious realm, as it opens up in blissful hope before him. It is the spirit world, where rules supreme the "Everlasting Judge, who in "even handed justice" unerringly rights wrongs, and rewards the true and the virtuous.

In those eventful moments, Hamlet fears no fallen spirits, prowling about intent on evil; with no affinity for them in life, he spurns them in death. Rather about him hover those faithful "guardian spirits," those "angels and ministers of grace" whom he loved and honored, and whom, in the face of danger, he was wont to invoke so readily. Have those glorious spirits come from their happy home to welcome his soul now fluttering on the verge of that mysterious world? Is the blissful smile that illumines his face, a recognition of their presence, a response to their joyous summons? Be that as it may, with the dawning of that smile is spent his last sigh; from the mortal tenement his immortal spirit has winged its flight.

With tearful eyes, the true and manly Horatio is bending over the lifeless form. He observes that luminous smile still lingering on his countenance. Its presence inspires him with awe and reverence, and impels him to utter with quivering lips, his Christian sentiment in a last fond farewell. "Good night, sweet prince!—peaceful be thy sleep till the grand awakening at the end of time: may choiring angels wing thy noble spirit to the realms of supernal bliss."

STARTLING REVELATIONS

Horatio's farewell is scarcely uttered, when noisy drums announce the approach of Fortinbras with his forces from the Polack war. He enters with his officers and the ambassadors just returned from England. Gazing about bewildered, he is horror-stricken at the dismal sight. "These many corpses," he claims, "cry aloud against ruthless slaughter. O proud death, how in thy eternal halls, thou dost revel over this bloody havoc!"

Horatio, in presence of the crowded court, sees that the moment is opportune for fulfilling the dying commission of his friend. "Let these bodies be placed," he says, "high on a stage to public view, and I shall publish Hamlet's story to you all and to the yet unknowing world;" disclose the slain monarch's "cruel, bloody and unnatural acts;" prove him a seducer, murderer, and fratricide; show before your wondering eyes his secret edict for his nephew's immediate execution, and how it resulted by "forced cause" in the death of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern; and, lastly, how in the presence of his royal court the criminal attempted to destroy Prince Hamlet by means of a treacherous potion, and again by an unbated and poisoned sword. When all this has been disclosed, let the ghosts of his victims join in chorus with the ghost of the elder Hamlet, to proclaim to the citizens of Denmark that the slaughter of the King was a just punishment, inflicted by decree of Heaven, upon a bloody criminal, a fratricide, an incestuous usurper, and multi-murderer whose living presence was a horrid plague infesting all the land. And then, in the eyes of approving Denmark, shall Hamlet appear a noble hero, the savior of his country, who, before losing his life by treachery, had rid the nation of a bloody monster, and thereby restored to harmony the discord

of the social and moral order, and brought smiling peace and happiness to the realm.

In reply, prince Fortinbras voices the eager desire of all to hear the exposition of the King's crimes, and, assuming preëminence by virtue of his rank, he orders all the nobles to be summoned to the audience.

. "High events as these,
Strike those that make them; and their story is
No less in pity, than his glory, which
Brought them to be lamented."

HAMLET'S SUCCESSOR

It is sometimes asserted that the death of Hamlet is the natural close of the tragedy; that its protraction by the after entrance of Fortinbras and the ambassadors, is but a drag on the interest of the audience; and that, therefore, the failure to ring down the curtain on the fall of the protagonist, deprives the tragedy of its greatest dramatic effect. This view may seem plausible, if, concentrating our interest on the hero, we lose sight of the completion and perfection of the tragedy as a whole. Shakespeare is always true to nature. Supereminent in his art, he recognized that dramatic perfection lies in the truthful interpretation of human life. This fundamental principle, at once his inspiration and his guide, we see embodied in all his master works. Hence, in *Lear*, in *Macbeth*, in *Julius Caesar*, in *Romeo and Juliet*, and in *Antony and Cleopatra*, as well as in *Hamlet*, he does not close with the fall of the protagonist, but proceeds to complete each tragedy in accordance with the chief canon of his art. Forgetfulness of this dramatic law, has, perhaps, led these objectors to consider Fortinbras' entrance after Hamlet's death a mere incident, to be omitted or not at will; whereas, it is, on the contrary, an element essential to the completion and perfection of the play.

If, in the fall of Hamlet and of Claudius, is annihilated a noble and powerful race of Kings, poetic justice demands that some intrinsic or satisfactory reason be assigned therefor; and such a reason, the Poet finds in the solemn truth of an over-ruling Providence, whose divine judgments are at times manifested among men. This idea of divine justice dominated the renowned dramatists of ancient Greece; in their tragedies, they inexorably devoted to destruction any royal line attainted by unnatural crimes. Nemesis, or just retribution, as unfolded in the world of art, possesses an element of permanency; it represents a principle underlying human life. Nemesis is a force which preserves the equilibrium of the moral world; it is a force whose potentiality waxes strong in proportion to departure from the law of rectitude; it is a force which acts in the interests of the virtuous, with whom we are in sympathy, and to the confusion of the wicked, with whom we are in antagonism.

Though the notion of poetic justice be emphasized in all the tragedies of Shakespeare, in none does he portray so well as in *Hamlet* his idea of an over-ruling Providence. "No other modern drama leaves a deeper impression of a super-human power presiding over a war of irregular and opposing forces, and calmly working out its own purpose through the baffled, disjointed, and conflicting purpose of human agents."⁴²

After the will of man had, by force of objective difficulties, been thwarted in meeting out legal justice to the criminal, Heaven itself intervenes to aid in the project. The fall of Claudius, it is true, forms the primary act of justice, inherent in the tragedy; but there is still another and a secondary act. It is the substitution of Fortinbras for the extinct line of Hamlet. His claim to the throne of Denmark

⁴² H. N. Hudson: "Tragedy of Hamlet", P. XLV.

was founded on hereditary right. Dispossessed in the person of his father by the elder Hamlet, his claim hung over the head of the usurper. When the fratricidal monarch falls in penalty of his crimes, and with him the line of Hamlet becomes extinct, then we see prince Fortinbras entering upon the scene, to assert his just claim :

For me, with sorrow I embrace my fortune;
I have some rights of memory in this kingdom,
Which now to claim, my vantage doth invite me.

By recognizing his claim, and more than once alluding to it, the Poet has already carefully prepared us for the final entrance of the Norwegian prince. Early in the drama, Horatio exposes how King Fortinbras was forced to yield the crown to the elder Hamlet; and later, we hear the complaint of Claudius against young Fortinbras, who was then intent upon invading Denmark to assert by force of arms his own hereditary right to the throne. The claim, moreover, is admitted by Hamlet in his last will and testament. It is made at the most solemn moment, when, by affirming with "dying voice" the right of the Norwegian prince, he makes a just and honorable amende for any act of injustice of which his father may have been guilty.

Thus the avenging justice of an over-ruling Providence, is seen not only to strike down the criminal usurper, but also to prepare the way for the crowning of the just inheritor. Such is the complete solution of the complex drama. Looking back upon that scene of bloody havoc, we see a new dawn looming over the valley of the shadow of death; and, as the princely Fortinbras marches into view, that dawn ripens into a glad sunrise, the harbinger of a better day, when the reign of virtue and of justice shall bring to distracted Denmark, a new life blessed with the calm of innocence and peace.

The tragedy aptly concludes with the eulogy of Fortinbras over the corpse of the fallen hero. If fortune had crowned Hamlet King, he would have proved himself a most royal ruler. The last and noblest scion of a warrior and kingly race, his shall be the honors of royal obsequies. Though fallen, he was yet victorious. Let war's shrill clarion trumpet the fact aloud! Let his corpse, decked in a warrior's full panoply, be borne away in triumphal march, with music's martial strains and all the rites of war. When, in fine, the curtain falls, as booming cannons cry aloud his mourning, one is apt to reflect that of all his sea-king forefathers, not one was more worthy, more gifted and heroic than this prince of Denmark, the last and noblest of a royal line.

EPILOGUE

Hamlet has been justly called a tragedy of thought or reflection. In the very opening scene it seems to throw upon us a spell, which induces a reflective mood in harmony with its action. As it unfolds itself, we continue to brood over its multiplying vicissitudes and awful enigmas of life, which action further deepens, and thought renders more perplexing. The spell still continues, even after the curtain falls on the appalling spectacle of horrors; for brooding over the unexpected fatal issues, our minds are troubled and confused by a thought which is irrepressible, the thought of the moral incongruities involved in the catastrophe. Oppressive indeed, and enigmatical must be the thought to the unbeliever. Recognizing no hereafter, he cannot even hope for future redress of the ills of life and the travesties of human justice.

Different, however, is the effect upon the Christian; his mind, illumined by revealed religious truths, soars above and beyond his own narrow horizon. He knows that this life is not the "be all and the end all" of human existence; that man's transient days on earth are but a probation to prepare for better and eternal years; that in this probation, man in the exercise of his freedom, shapes his own eternal destiny in proportion as he uses his free will for good, or abuses it for evil; and that his reward or punishment is commonly delayed until the harvest, when the cockle shall be sifted from the wheat.

The solution then lies in the religion of Hamlet, and as that religion was Shakespeare's own, its principles actuated his thoughts and sentiments, and gave the tragedy an out-

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come in conformity therewith. Hence, the play, while not professedly religious, reveals, nevertheless, a deep, silent, and mysterious under-current, which suggests the presence of some vaster and invisible power at work throughout the tragedy. That pervading religious idea originates from the first with the advent of the solemn and majestic visitor from the spirit world. The mandate which is imposed upon the hero dominates him in thought and deed through the drama. That religious idea deepens with the progress of the action, as we see the tragic character often recognizing in incidents unforeseen and surprising, the secret hand of Providence, and resigning himself to His guidance. That same idea is, in fine, emphasized at the hero's death, when angels are supposed to bear away his soul to eternal rest.

It was that same religious idea that enabled the Poet to abandon for this once, in favor of his own loved creation, the beaten path of tragedy, and so turn our crushed and rebellious feelings of dismay and protest into sentiments of gratitude and gladness. That idea empowered him to lift in part the veil of futurity, so as to allow us to perceive that Hamlet's harsh fate is not the ultimate truth concerning him; that, though fallen, he is in a manner untouched by the doom that overtakes him. The tragic world is but a partial view of a whole beyond our material vision. "The fury of its conflict with all its errors, woes, and waste is not half the truth, nor the final reality, but only a small fragment of a greater whole, where death counts for little, but greatness of soul for much."⁴³

Hamlet, as the Poet suggests, was not so much deprived of life as set free from mortal bondage. Death only ushered him into that vaster glorious sphere of immortal existence, where in spite of seeming failure, the brave and virtuous are

⁴³ Cf. Bradley's "Shakespearean Tragedies", p. 174.

EPILOGUE

after heroic strife crowned with victory. To the Christian, therefore, the mystery, or enigma is solved by those divine revelations which partially reveal that undiscovered country, where reigns in "even-handed justice," the "Everlasting Judge, who renders to every man according to his works." Hence, for the moral incongruities displayed in the catastrophe, the Christian, with mind illumined by divine rays, finds a solution which, soothing the tumult of his heart, brings peace after the storm. These revealed truths give a moral scope and significance to the drama. That they were deeply graven on the Poet's Christian mind, appears from the frequent reference in his many dramas to the Last or General Judgment. Often in his youthful days, when at worship with his Christian parents, young Shakespeare must have studied the large mural paintings which adorned the Trinity Chapel at Stratford. Its largest and most distinctive fresco was in full view of the nave above the great chancel arch, and, rich in details, represented in allegory the Last Judgment, or Day of Doom. Impressions made in younger days last longest.⁴⁴

It is this portrayal of the deep religious mystery, which over-shadows the protagonist, both in his meditative, solitary walks on the shores of the spirit world, as well as in his conscientious struggles for moral good against moral evil, that makes him reflect the immortal hopes and aspirations which have animated suffering humanity through all the ages. In this light the hero becomes but a type of myriads of mortals who in a sinful world bear the sorrows of mankind. In consequence, the tragedy, awe-inspiring, attractive, and instinct with burning thoughts common to our race, has won a popularity which the flight of time, instead of diminishing, has only deepened and made universal.

⁴⁴ The fresco, still visible and well preserved in 1802, was later, in a general renovation of the Chapel, covered with a coat of whitewash. As the painting was upon plaster, it is now probably lost to the world. But, fortunately, copies of the fresco had been made by Thomas Fisher, F. S. A., and these survive bound in a rare volume.

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Though Hamlet's soul is not avowedly at stake, it is none the less so in reality. Its eternal loss or gain ever present to his mind, seems to haunt him through the drama and to loom up in the background of every Act in larger or smaller proportions. From the start, we are fascinated by his character. His noble nature, adorned with high intellectual gifts, and moral worth, and beauty, so wins our admiration and our sympathy, that in watchful eagerness, we accompany him in his moral struggles with ever increasing interest. We see him in an insufferable mental agony, aweary of the world and of life, sighing for death, and yet resolving in Christian fortitude, to bear "the heart-ache and the thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to," rather than transgress the law of the Almighty. We see him, delicate of conscience and alert against the wiles of the evil spirit, testing the nature and veracity of the ghost. We see him in filial devotion, pledging himself to the work of "revenge," for which he sacrifices the world, life, and all, save the eternal welfare of his immortal soul. We see him sorely tempted in almost daily conflicts, when he beats down the insurrection of the *man* against the *superman*, an insurrection of blind irascible passions, which in rebellion against reason and conscience, urge him to throw his sense of Christian duty to the winds, and at once to strike the criminal in a personal revenge, even though thereby he taint his immortal soul. We see him, resolved upon a punishment approved by Christian principles of justice, seeking zealously for proofs which will justify his act before the eyes of his fellowmen, his conscience, and his God, and on this appearing hopeless, turning to an all-ruling Providence, whose Divinity shapes our destinies if we but trust in Him. We see him a solitary, wandering amid the noisy and irreligious crew of an immoral court, alone concerned with his unworthy mother, whom, from a sense of filial devotion and of

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Christian piety, he labors to awaken from a sinful love, to a sense of shame and of peril to her soul. We see him everywhere in sharp contrast with the powers of evil, a noble Christian youth, who, though afflicted by the deepest melancholy at the sight of wickedness triumphant, maintains, like the lone rose in the desert waste, the fragrance of integrity. We see him at last, when, after pardoning in a Christian spirit of forgiveness the murderous act of his treacherous friend, he falls a sacrifice to sacred duty; but he falls victorious over evil, and the consciousness of this fact prompts him to appeal from time to eternity.

Our interest in the Prince survives the catastrophe. Our sympathy, which he has won, and even our affection, compel us to follow him in spirit to the life beyond the grave. That mourning cortege with martial strains, and roar of cannon, and all the glittering pomp of war, may fetter the mind of the worldling or unbeliever who cannot soar above the perishable; but the Christian man of faith accompanies in thought the hero's immortal spirit in its flight to the world invisible. The storm clouds rolling by, have left the skies impressively serene, and in the calm, deep silence of the scene, the Christian peers in fancy far beyond those twinkling sentinels of Heaven into the spirit realm where he may fondly hope that the soul of such a noble man of nature has safely reached the haven of celestial rest. His was a painful conflict, his the victory, and his now a crown enduring with the eternal years. Let our farewell to the noble-minded Prince, be re-echoed in the tender and inspiring words of his own true friend:

“Good night, sweet prince;
And flights of angels sing thee to thy rest!”

APPENDIX

NOTE ON THE DOCTRINE OF REPENTANCE AND JUSTIFICATION IN RELATION TO THE CONFLICT OF THE KING AT PRAYER (page 315)

Radically opposed to the notion of justification by *faith alone* is the doctrine of the Church. She teaches that man in his very creation was by the bounty of God elevated to a supernatural state and ennobled by certain supernatural gifts and graces which, transcending his human nature, were in no manner due to it. He was, moreover, free from concupiscence, so that his sensuous appetites were perfectly subject to reason, and this freedom he was to transfer to posterity. This absolute dominion of reason over the appetites of his lower nature, was not, however, a perfection natural to his being, but wholly a preternatural gift, that is a gift not due to human nature, nor was it, on the other hand, the essence of original justice which consisted in sanctifying grace.

When man by sin forfeited his supernatural gifts he, nevertheless, retained all that belonged to his natural being as man. His sin of disobedience is commonly called original, because it formally consists in the privation of original justice by reason of the primordial sin of our common nature in the person of our first forefather. From original sin, followed, however, an inclination to evil, because of the loss of the restraining elements of original justice; for man's reason, by means of his supernatural gifts, perfectly restrained the forces of his inferior nature; and the subtraction of these gifts meant the loss of these restraints, and this loss is called "the wounding of our nature." (St. Thom. I. 2. Q. 85.)

In falling from his high estate, man's lower nature rebelled against his rational soul; his lower appetites began to lust against his spirit; and concupiscence, now unchecked, obscured the mind, and without destroying freedom of will, nevertheless, rendered it less firm in resisting evil and in pursuing good. Hence, if man's fallen nature be compared with his former state of original justice, he may be said to be wounded in his nature, or to be changed for the worse in the exercise of his powers both of soul and body.

Concupiscence in its widest acceptation is any yearning of the soul for good; but in its strict and specific acceptation, it signifies

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a desire of the lower appetite contrary to reason. To understand how the sensuous and rational appetite can be opposed, it should be borne in mind that their natural objects are altogether different. The object of the former is the gratification of the senses; the object of the latter is the good of the whole rational nature, and consists in the subordination of the lower to the rational faculties and again in the subordination of man to God, his supreme good and ultimate end. But the lower appetite being of itself unrestrained, pursues sensuous gratifications independently of the understanding, and without regard to the good of the higher faculties. Hence, desires contrary to the real good and order of reason may, and often do arise in it, previous to the attention of the mind, and solicit the will to assent while they more or less hinder reason from considering their lawfulness or unlawfulness. Such is concupiscence in its strict and specific sense. As long however, as deliberation is not impeded completely, the rational will is able to resist such desires, and withhold consent. If in fact the will resists, a struggle ensues: the sensuous appetite rebelliously demanding its gratification, reason on the contrary clinging to its own spiritual interests, and asserting its control. "The flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh."

From these considerations, it is plain that the opposition between appetite and reason is natural in man, and, though an imperfection, is not a corruption of human nature. Concupiscence is an effect of original sin, and inclines to sin, but its inordinate desires have not in themselves the nature of sin, and though it be true that they are temptations to sin, becoming the stronger and the more frequent, the oftener they are indulged, nevertheless, they cannot contract the nature of sin unless consent is given them by the will; for sin, being the free and deliberate transgression of the law of God, can only be in man's rational will. Though by the merits of Christ, original sin is wiped out by the sacrament of baptism, and the soul is cleansed and justified again by the infusion of sanctifying grace, yet freedom from concupiscence is not restored to man by this sacrament any more than is the gift of immortality; abundant grace is, however, given by which man may triumph over rebellious sense, and merit life everlasting.

Rejecting the new doctrine of the "Reformers" that concupiscence is original sin, that it corrupts human nature and destroys free will, the Church, moreover denies that a sinner is justified before God by faith alone. Faith, it is true, is the first subjective and indispensable condition for justification, and the root from which God's approval must spring. Both the Catholic and Protestant Christian believe that for salvation man must adhere to

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Christ, and enter into a spiritual connection with Him; but with the Catholic this adherence is not a mere connection of ideas, nor a mere recognition of religious truths, nor a mere theoretic and naked faith, but a vivifying practical faith which, in the renewal or regeneration of spirit, changes the sinner from an unjust to a just man, and makes him an adopted son of God. Faith is the basis, but sanctifying grace which with charity and other supernatural virtues, is unfused into the soul, is the principle or substantial force of this regeneration. Love must vivify faith before man becomes truly pleasing to God. Faith in love and love in faith form an inseparable unity in the work of the sinner's justification.

Confusion often arises from the fact that non-Catholics are wont to consider the remission of sin and the justification of the sinner as two separate acts, whereas Catholic faith teaches that the infusion of grace and the remission of sin, like the illumination of space and the dispersion of darkness, is but one and the same simultaneous act. Sin and sanctifying grace cannot coexist in the soul; for mutually destructive, the one banishes the other. Sanctifying grace is a supernatural gift which, by infusing through the merits of Christ a new spiritual life and image of God into the soul, ennobles man, and makes him just and an adopted son of heaven, capable of doing works meritorious for eternal life. These supernatural gifts can be forfeited only by sin which is called mortal, because it kills the supernatural life of the soul. When man, therefore, by grievous offense against God, forfeits these supernal gifts, he deforms and befouls his soul by the leprosy of sin, which renders him hideous in the eyes of God. This sin with its guilt and contamination is eradicated only when God deigns through the merits of Christ to infuse anew into the soul the grace of justification; and this grace, by restoring again the supernatural life lost by the sinner, necessarily banishes sin and its deformities from the soul, and regains for him the friendship of God.

Hence, forgiveness of sin and justification of the sinner, are one and the same act of grace in the soul; for the one involves the other. Justification, in a negative sense, is the remission of sin, but in a positive sense, it is the actual cleansing or justifying of the soul by the infusion of sanctifying grace. When God, therefore, declares a sinner to be just and pleasing to Him, it is not, because He ignores the hideous leprosy of sin in the soul, or covers it from view by a mantle, but because He really and truly makes the sinner just by the infusion of sanctifying grace which by its nature necessarily destroying the guilt of sin and its direful effects, restores to man his supernatural gifts, and makes him truly holy and pleasing in the sight of God. When Christ said to the leper,

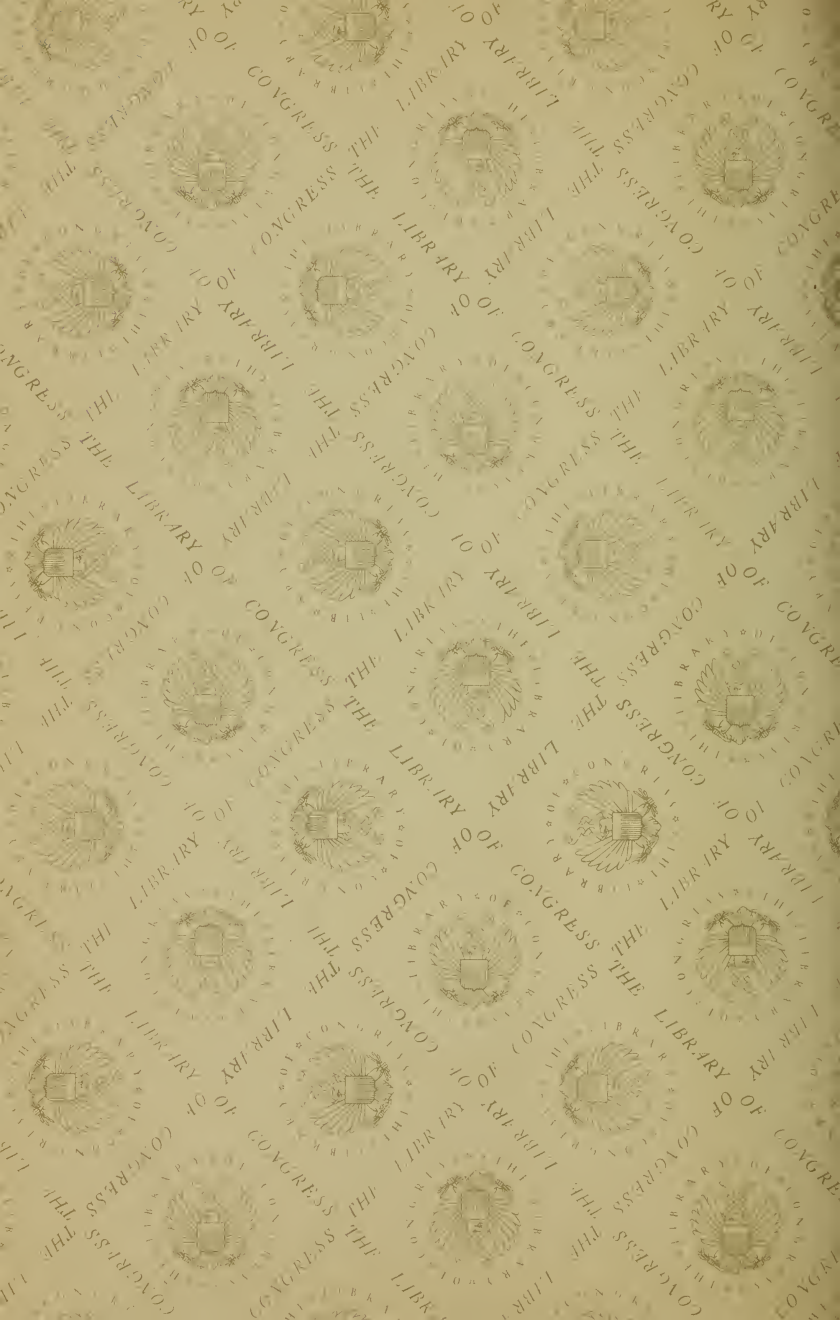
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“be thou made clean,” the unfortunate man was at once cleansed from his leprosy; so when God justifies a sinner, he of course makes him just by cleansing his soul from every taint of injustice which was induced by the leprosy of sin.

In the work of justification, according to Catholic principles, concur two operations, the one divine and the other human; and these naturally pervade each other so that there results but one act. By preceding grace God awakens and excites the sinner, and offers His aid to uplift him after his fall; if the sinner accepts the divine assistance, he is in turn accepted by the Holy Spirit.

This interworking of the Holy Spirit and of man freely co-operating in the process of justification may be briefly noted. It is the mercy of God alone that offers to man supernatural happiness. He makes this offer known through the preaching of His Church, and accompanies it with an interior stirring grace. If man co-operates with this grace, he believes the truths of divine revelation with a certainty that nothing can shake. He sees reasons to fear God's justice, and throws himself on God's mercy, detesting his sin and trusting in the merits of Christ. Thus by the co-operation of grace and man's free will, the way is prepared for justification; and provided that man puts no obstacle in the way, the Holy Spirit works his justification by pouring His grace and charity into his soul.

Though justification be complete and the same in all the just, nevertheless, the sanctification of each man progresses in proportion to his own supernaturally aided efforts; for the new spiritual life implanted in the soul, enables man to exercise himself in truly good works which through Christ merit an increase of sanctifying grace, and this increase, measured by man's individual spiritual efforts, is more replete in some than in others.





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